

**Full Length Play: *Monster-Truck-Parts*
and
Critical Essay: ‘Does *Monster-Truck-Parts* mark the end of new writing?’**

By

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MONSTER – TRUCK – PARTS

Jonathan Lloyd

Characters.

Caroline, *late twenties*

Steve, *late twenties*

Ian, *early twenties*

Graham, *thirties*

Scene One.

The living room of a council flat in a large '60s concrete tower block. The place is rundown; thick, black mould crawls from the corners of the walls onto the ceiling, the dated wallpaper is stained and ripped and there are signs of fire damage. There is the front door to the left and two other doors to the right, one to the bathroom and the other to the bedroom. There's a small, dilapidated kitchen to the back and the usual living room furniture to the front; sofa, armchair, fold-out dining table, coffee table etc, all old, scratched and torn. There is also a relic of a television stood precariously on a small, broken table at front.

Caroline *is slumped in the armchair. She watches daytime telly and smokes a cigarette. A used plate, a coffee mug and a glass ash tray stand on a small table at her side. From the doorway to the kitchen area, has been placed a strategic line of newspaper.*

*Meanwhile, **Graham**, dishevelled and barefooted, perches on the ledge of the open sash window above the kitchen sink. He looks out into the flat, back to the outside world. He comes to the end of a cigarette, stubs it out on the ledge and tosses it out of the window. He stares out. He seems resolute and resigned.*

He then leans back and follows the cigarette.

Silence.

Caroline *stubs her cigarette out in the ash tray. She shivers. She rubs her arms to keep warm. She then hauls herself up, begrudgingly, and drags her body to the window. With a little effort, she pulls the sash down. She gradually returns herself to the armchair, slumps back down as her boyfriend, **Steve**, enters in dirty overalls and boots. He strides along the paper trail to the sink to wash his hands. Neither says a word to each other. **Steve** swills his face using his hands. He dries his hands and then his face on the kitchen towel.*

Caroline: *(Without looking around)* I wish you wouldn't do that.

Steve: Do what?

Caroline: You know.

Steve: Don't start.

Caroline: Well don't do it. It's disgusting.

Steve: OK.

Caroline: I'll have to wash it now. I've told you so many times. I don't want to dry my hands on a snotty towel. Who would?

Steve *tosses the towel in the washing machine. He drinks from the tap and then sits on the kitchen surface.*

Steve: How was your day?

Caroline: How do you think?

Steve: OK then. How was your *shit* day?

Caroline *turns her head to look at him with a disapproving glance.*

Steve: (*Smirks*) Sorry. Couldn't 'elp it.

Caroline: (*Stern*) I know. (*Turns back to the TV*)

Steve: How were Phil and Holly?

Caroline: Irritatingly happy. They interviewed a transvestite again. All they seem to do on that show is interview transvestites. It's like a promotion; as if they want us all to be transvestites. (*Pause*) That Italian chef cooked a lasagne. He called it his *special* lasagne; a lasagne with a *twist*. Seemed just like a normal lasagne to me.

Steve: What's for dinner?

Caroline: Lasagne. Ready meal. In the freezer.

Steve: A microwave job?

Caroline: Yes. A microwave job.

Steve: You don't cook anymore.

Caroline: How observant of you.

Steve: Why not?

Caroline: (*Pause*) Because.

Steve: Because ...?

Caroline: (*Loses her temper*) Because that's just life, Steve. Your girlfriend doesn't cook anymore! Get used to it.

Steve: Right.

Long pause.

Caroline: I'm sorry. OK?

Steve: OK. (*Pause*) I'm sorry too.

Caroline: You don't need to be sorry. (*Pause*) How was work?

Steve: Not bad. Not too busy. Changed the head-gasket on a Mondeo.

Beat.

Caroline: Did you get any grief today?

Steve: What?

Caroline: From the guys. Did they hassle you today? About – me?

Steve: No.

Caroline: Really?

Steve: Yeah.

Caroline: Not even -

Steve: Caroline.

Caroline: What?

Steve: Not everythin' revolves round you –

Caroline: I –

Steve: round – that.

Caroline: I was –

Steve: No one said nothin'. You never came up.

Caroline: So they're too embarrassed to even broach it. Too repulsed to even mutter my –

Steve: Oh, for –

Caroline: What?

Steve: You're bein' – look, they were nice. Same as usual – laughin', swearin' – jokin'. That's it. You should be pleased.

Caroline: I know. I am. It's – well – it's just not that simple.

Pause.

Steve: I'll put the dinner in.

Steve retrieves the ready meal from the freezer. He removes the packaging and shoves it in the microwave. He opens the crockery cupboard. He stops, puzzled.

Steve: Caroline?

Caroline: Yeah?

Steve: Where are all the plates?

Pause

Caroline: Oh. I forgot.

Steve: What do you mean?

Caroline: (*Sheepishly*) Look in the bin.

Steve opens the lid of the bin.

Steve: Caroline.

Caroline: I just lost it. Needed something to break.

Steve: But you didn't just break *somin'*, you broke ... *everythin'*.

Caroline: I'm sorry.

Steve: We're skint, remember? We can't –

Caroline: I said I was sorry.

Steve: (*Exasperated*) You gotta think, Caroline. Before you do things. "Course, if you did that then we wouldn't be "ere in the first place.

Pause.

Caroline: That was unfair.

Steve: Sorry. (*Pause*) God, every other word is sorry right now.

Caroline: Tell me about it. (*Pause*) I'm sorry – I *apologise* – about the plates.

Steve: That's OK. I'll go get some plastic ones tomorrow. They do a pack of five in Poundland. (*Pause*) For a – pound. (*Pause*) I doubt that'll break the bank. We'll just "ave to –

Steve opens another cupboard.

Caroline: You'll have to get some bowls too.

Steve decides not to say anything. He wanders into the living area and perches on the arm of the sofa.

Caroline: How long – ?

Steve: Huh?

Caroline: The lasagne.

Steve: Oh. ‘Bout five minutes, I think.

Caroline: How long has it been in?

Steve: About two, I suppose.

Caroline: Good. I‘m starving.

Steve: (*Looks over at the plate on the table*) What you ‘ad today?

Caroline: A piece of toast.

Steve: Is that all? Not surprised you‘re starvin‘.

Caroline: I didn‘t really feel like eating earlier.

Steve: Well you must. You‘ll waste away.

Caroline: Look at me. Do you really think I‘ll be doing that anytime soon?

Steve: I like your size. Not too big. Not too little. Just right.

Caroline: Yeah. I know what *you* think.

Steve *picks up the plate and examines it closely.*

Steve: Any marmite?

Caroline: Marmite?

Steve: Yeah. On your toast.

Caroline: Oh. No. Makes me sick.

Steve: I can‘t do toast with no Marmite.

Caroline: I know.

Long pause as he examines the plate further.

Steve: Butter?

Caroline: What?

Steve: Did you put butter on it?

Caroline: No. Just plain.

Steve: Just plain? Well that's like cardboard. You could've put some butter on it.

Caroline: (*Firm*) Yes. I know I could have. But I didn't. OK?

Pause.

Steve places the plate back down and peers inside the mug.

Steve: What was in the mug?

Caroline: Coffee.

Steve: *Just* coffee?

Caroline: (*Pause*) I may have put a little bit of rum in there. (*Pause*) Or a lot of rum. (*Pause*) Mostly rum.

Steve: Caroline.

Caroline: What?

Pause.

Steve: Nothin'.

Pause.

I don't deserve this, y'know?

Caroline: You?

Steve: Yeah. Me.

Caroline: Hmm. Oh well.

Silence. Steve just looks at her disgusted. With a cold glare and a grunt, he gets up and walks to the door.

Caroline: (*Lazily, from her chair*) Steve. Don't go. (*Firmer*) Steve.

Steve pauses. He then proceeds to reach for the handle but the microwave pings. He stops.

Steve: You still 'ungry?

Caroline: What do *you* think?

Steve wanders into the kitchen and removes the lasagne from the microwave with an oven mitt. He takes two forks from the drawer and brings the food in its black plastic container over to **Caroline**. He places it down on the coffee table and passes **Caroline** a fork. She leans forward in the armchair to scoop some lasagne onto her fork. She eats.

Mmm. It's good.

Steve sits down on the footstool and begins to eat.

Steve: (*Mouth full*) Not bad. Two quid, this. (*Getting up*) Drink?

Caroline: What?

Steve: Want a drink?

Caroline: Oh. No.

Steve: Sure?

Caroline: Yeah.

Steve goes to the fridge and retrieves a can of lager. He opens it and slurps up the overspill which spurts out of the can.

Caroline: What have you got?

Steve: Lager.

Caroline: Can you get me one?

Steve: But –

Caroline: I changed my mind.

Steve retrieves another lager from the fridge, begrudgingly but silently. He walks back into the living area and passes it to her. He sits back down on the footstool. **Caroline** opens the can.

Are you going out tonight?

Steve: Didn't think to.

Caroline: That's good. Quiet night in then?

Steve: Looks like it.

Caroline: Watch a film maybe.

Steve: Yeah. I'll need a shower.

Caroline: Not a long one though.

Steve: No. Not a long one.

Caroline: Can't afford it.

Steve: I know.

Caroline: Maybe next month.

Steve: Huh?

Caroline: Maybe we can have longer showers next month. Or maybe even baths. Next month. If I get a job.

Steve: When.

Caroline: What?

Steve: I said when. *When* you get a job.

Caroline: Oh.

Steve: Be optimistic.

Caroline: Yeah. Ok. *When* I get a job then.

Steve: How many CVs you given out?

Caroline: Not sure. Twenty. Thirty maybe.

Steve: Good start. Any replies?

Caroline: Not yet. (*Pause*) I need to work.

Steve: Yeah. Maybe you could write a book.

Caroline: Mum says I should.

Steve: You should. You 'ave the time.

Pause.

Could be good to write things down. It'll probably 'elp you move on.

Beat.

Caroline: Move on?

Steve *sits on the arm of the chair and puts his arm around Caroline.*

Steve: It – all – it don't matter.

Caroline: It does.

Steve: Not to me.

Caroline: You're a fool.

Steve: *(Nods)* I know.

Steve *takes Caroline's fork from the table, shovels some lasagne onto it and brings it to Caroline's mouth.*

Open up.

Caroline *opens her mouth and eats.*

Steve: *(Takes the can of lager)* Wash it down.

Caroline: Since when did I revert back to being a child?

Steve: I just like lookin' after you.

Caroline: *(Smiles)* You're sweet.

Caroline *opens her mouth and Steve pours the lager down her throat. Steve places the can down on the table and gets up.*

Steve: I'm gonna take a shower.

Steve *picks up a newspaper from the floor and drops it in Caroline's lap.*

Look at the job pages.

Steve *exits into the bathroom.*

Caroline: *(Calls)* I don't know why I'm bothering, y'know. This is the worst time to be looking. Unemployment rising every day they say on the telly.

Steve: *(Calling from the bathroom)* You could be lucky. You might be just –

Caroline: I doubt it.

Steve: Just look. Circle the ones you're interested in.

Caroline: Alright.

The sound of the bathroom door shutting. The sound of the shower.

Don't waste the water!

Pause. Caroline flicks through the pages dismissively, resigned to the fact that there are no opportunities or that she is just no longer interested. She lays the newspaper open on the coffee table, scrapes the rest of the lasagne onto it, and gathers the paper up at the corners. She walks over to the kitchen and bins it. Returning to the armchair, she downs her can of lager and the rest of Steve's. She burps. She then proceeds to shove her hand down her joggers and pleasure herself.

Ian enters the flat. Caroline doesn't respond.

Ian: I'm home!

Caroline still fails to respond.

Ian takes his shoes off at the door. He crosses to the kitchen sink and washes his hands. He calls into the other room.

How was your day? Mine was shit. No surprises there, eh?

He goes for the towel but it's gone. Instead, he wipes his hands on his jeans.

Did I tell you where I was today? Before I left. Travelodge. Fucking skanky Travelodge. Cleaning up after miserable, boring people who are too fucking tight to stay in a proper hotel. Or – seedy bastards and their ugly, Chlamydia-ridden mistresses. Lost count of how many cum stains I found on the sheets. And pubic hairs. Fucking tons of pubic hair. If I'd collected it all together, I could have made a wig. *(Laughs)* Have you ever seen a ginger pube before? If you ever do, which you probably won't, but if you do, hold it up to the light. It fucking shimmers. Like a beacon. No kidding.

I bet you're hungry. I'll be in to feed you in a minute. I'll just have a smoke. I need it.

He sits on the edge of the sofa and rolls a spliff on the footstool. Caroline curls up into the armchair.

They gave me this supervisor. Don't know why I needed a supervisor. The job was hardly rocket science. Went in. Whipped the old sheets off, whipped the fresh ones on, ran the vacuum round, made sure there was no floater left in the toilet bowl and that was it. But they still thought I needed a supervisor. Fat, grumpy Polish bitch, she was. Hardly spoke a word of English. I'd ask her a question and she'd just look at me blank, as if she'd fucking broken. Fucking useless. But she'll be good for something. I've decided. She'll be my muse. I'm going to paint her. Make her look even uglier. „The grotesque spectacle of immigrant Britain“. It'll be my prize work. Controversial but honest. Exposing the fundamental flaws in

our society. Displaying what the whole nation is thinking but are too scared and brainwashed into submission to say. *(Pause)* I was thinking of painting it with a load of different sauces. Instead of proper paints. HP. Tomato ketchup. Barbecue sauce. Mint sauce. Tabasco, maybe. Use it as a metaphor. „Greasy, slimy parasites sucking Britain dry“. And then once it's finished, the whole thing will fucking reek. Of them. Of their filthy, rotten, seedy culture.

I made myself laugh. Yeah. I did. On the bus. Before. Thinking about this. Actually, no, I made myself fucking roar! I thought about doing a Damien Hurst and stuffing the Polish bitch and shoving her in a Perspex box. *(Laughs)* That'd be good, wouldn't it? Fucking hilarious! Now that's something I'd pay to see.

Ian *takes a drag on the spliff.*

Agency haven't told me where I'm going tomorrow. Which probably means I'm going fucking nowhere. I may not get anything else until next week. Next month, even. *(Pause)* I hate this. I fucking despise this. All these shit jobs. No one would ever think I went to college. Got a degree. I didn't flunk life like most of the others at our school and most of them are in better positions than me now, y'know? I saw Dean Hayworth the other day – in the cereal aisle at Asda. *(Louder)* You remember Dean Hayworth, don't you? You must remember Dean Hayworth. Skinny, mouthy cunt. He was the one who suddenly broke out in acne at the beginning of Year Nine – it covered his whole ugly face and made him look even uglier. He was always a fucking waster and arrogant with it too. Had an answer for everything. All the teachers despised him. Mr Cartwright used to call him a little shit. Remember? He even used to say it to his mum at parents evening. „Your kid is a little shit“, he'd say. And she'd agree with him too. School couldn't wait to get rid of him. Do you know how many GCSEs he got in the end? One. In P.E. because he could just about manage to kick a ball. Well guess what he's doing now. General Manager of a national Health Club chain. Just because he can fucking kick a fucking ball. Saw him getting into his car afterwards. Aston fucking Martin. Personalised number plate. Pity it didn't spell „COCK“. I bet he only shops in Asda just so he can say he's in touch with the „common people“, hasn't abandoned his roots. Fucking fraud. He's still an ugly cunt too. No acne anymore. But he's always had one of those faces that you take one look at and you just have this sudden urge to punch it. Fucking smack it.

Ian *gestures a swipe, imagining Dean Hayworth's face.*

He always laughed at me. I remember you always used to stick up for me until you couldn't anymore. He'd call me a ponce because I was interested in art and was able to draw something more impressive than just a cock on the desk. I always thought I'd be the one left laughing. Howling down his miserable, spotty throat. But no. That wasn't meant to be. Apparently. Instead, he's still laughing at me.

I blame my parents. I blame yours too. Selfish cunts. Too involved in their own pathetic lives. Where are yours now? Spain, isn't it? I think that's where they are. Did you read the postcard they sent the other month? I'm sure I showed it to you. Arrogant tossers; us stuck here in this shit-tip and them sunning themselves and drinking martinis, forgetting you even exist. I can see their faces now – overjoyed – when they realised they could palm you off on me and go and make up for all the years they had to sacrifice. Sacrifice. They don't know the first fucking thing about sacrifice. And mine. Well, waste of breath talking about them. Oblivious.

No. *Ignorant* of everything. I left for college and that was it. Responsibility finished – washed their hands.

Pause.

Sorry. I know what you're thinking. „Not all this again“. It must get so monotonous; me harping on, when all you can do is sit in there – just listening. It's – I dunno – sometimes you just need to – vent. Don't you? Make yourself a little – lighter. Yeah? (*Calls into the bedroom*) Know what I mean? Of course you do. You've always understood me.

Pause.

Are you getting impatient? I know you are. I can hear you murmuring. I'll get you some food now.

Ian gets up and strides to the kitchen. He takes a packet of microwavable rice from the cupboard and shoves it in the microwave. He waits, leaning against the surface, and puffs on his spliff.

I'll just finish my fag. I know how much you hate it. That's good of me, isn't it? Considerate. Keeping it away from you. Some of the smell may drift through, but at least you don't get it all at once. The smell's good mind, isn't it? Sort of musty but exotic at the same time.

The microwave pings. He takes a final drag on the spliff and then stubs it out in the sink. He removes the packet of rice from the microwave straight onto a plate. He moves to the fridge, retrieves the ketchup and squeezes a generous amount into the rice. He returns the ketchup bottle to the fridge, gets a fork from the drawer and walks towards the bedroom.

I'm coming! You can stop murmuring now. Yeah, you may be doing it quietly, but I can still hear you. Elephant ears me. Alright! I'm coming!

Ian exits to the bedroom.

Caroline stirs. She drags herself to her feet and goes to gather up the trail of newspaper.

Caroline: (*Mutters*) Short shower my arse. Want to put us on the streets?

Steve enters the living room, naked. **Caroline** comes up from collecting the paper to be faced with **Steve's** crotch in her face.

Steve: Sex?

Pause. Caroline stares at him, expressionless.

Caroline: No thanks.

She bins the newspaper and walks back to the sofa. Steve follows her.

Steve: Why not?

Caroline: Because.

Steve: Because -?

Caroline: Because I'm tired. And you've just showered.

Steve: Well, yeah, it gets sweaty under the bonnet. Thought you'd appreciate it.

Caroline: I do. But I still don't want to have sex with you.

Pause. Steve waits, expectantly. Caroline walks to the armchair. Steve follows her.

Steve: Oh come on, Caroline.

Caroline: *(Slumps down in the armchair)* No.

Steve: Carrie.

Caroline: *(Suddenly defensive)* Don't call me that.

Steve: Alright. Just – why won't you have sex with your boyfriend?

Caroline: I just don't feel like it.

Steve: You're always saying that. It ain't just women who 'ave needs, y'know?

Caroline: Go call yourself a hooker then. Feel free to do her on the sofa and I'll sit here quite happily watching my programme. 'Cause men have needs after all. Who am I to stand in your way?

Pause. Steve glares down at her.

Steve: You're a bitch.

Caroline: I know.

Steve walks off into the bedroom. As he leaves, Ian enters. They pass but don't acknowledge each other. Caroline stares out.

Ian: *(Calling back to the bedroom)* I'm just getting you a spoon. It'll make it easier. *(Mutters as he rifles through the cutlery drawer for a spoon)* Fucking retard. Do this, Ian. No, do it this way. And this way. And every other god damn fucking way under the fucking sun. Stupid fucking idiotic retard.

Ian finds a spoon, slams the cutlery drawer and hauls himself back to tend to Jason.

Caroline is left alone. Long silence. Caroline thinks to herself.

Caroline: *(Calls)* Are you still naked?

Steve: *(Calls back – aside)* Yeah.

Caroline: You thought I'd come around?

Steve: I was "opin.

Caroline: You could be lucky.

Steve: Right. So I won't "ave to call an "ooker then?

Caroline: Perhaps not. Give us a minute.

She looks around and finds a pen on the coffee table. She then rips two scrap corners from the newspaper and proceeds to write on both of them. She mutters what she is writing.

Refuse awful, cringe-worthy sex. Fake orgasm and say that he's the most amazing lover you've ever had.

She screws the bits of paper up and tosses them in her mug. She gives the mug a little, unenthusiastic shake and then picks one out at random. She unscrews it and reads what it says.

Silence.

She gets up.

Ok. Sex it is. But make it quick. I'm not missing my programme.

On her way to the bedroom, she pulls off her clothes so she's just in her underwear as she exits.

The space is silent. No one enters.

The phone rings. And rings. No one comes out to answer it, as if it wasn't ringing at all. It goes to answer phone.

Ian Recorded Voice: Hey. You've got through to Ian. Leave a message and I'll get back to you.

Silence.

Electronic beep from the machine. A blood-curdling, frantic scream and the call cuts out. Beep.

Pause.

*And then another scream – this time, **Caroline** from the bedroom. An over-the-top orgasmic scream.*

Silence.

Steve: *(From the bedroom)* You faked it!

Steve storms out into the living room, pulling his clothes on.

You fuckin’ faked it!

Caroline quickly enters behind him, in her underwear.

Caroline: Steve –

Caroline grabs her joggers from the floor and pulls them on.

Steve: I ‘aint thick, y’know?

Caroline: I –

Steve: I know I’m not no genius.

Caroline: You –

Steve: Like you –

Caroline: I’m not –

Steve: But I think I can tell when a woman’s taking me for a fuckin’ ride!

Caroline: Steve. Come on. You’re being –

Steve: Do you know what the guys at work call me? They call me „silly, stupid, sucker Steve“. Sucker Steve! Yeah. They can’t believe I’m still with you.

Caroline: But you –

Steve: I lied. Tryin’ to protect your feelings. ‘Cause that’s what I do! No thanks for it though. *(Emotional)* And they’re right. I am fuckin’ wet. A fuckin’ pushover. But I can’t be any other way. Thing is, I fuckin’ worship the ground you walk on. ‘Owever much shit you chuck at me, I stay the same. ‘Ow I treat you, ‘ow I see us never changes.

Caroline has turned serious.

Caroline: Babe.

Caroline hugs him from behind – around his middle. **Steve** pushes her away.

Steve: And this fuckin' place. Just makin' everythin' ten times fuckin' worse. Fuckin'—
POISON.

Caroline: Steve. It's—

Steve: It's different for you. You didn't start 'ere.

Caroline: I know.

Steve: You 'ad nice 'ouse. Carin' parents. Good education.

Caroline: I know.

Steve: I weren't as lucky as you.

Caroline: I know.

Steve: Stop saying „I know“.

Pause.

It's annoyin'.

Caroline: Why?

Steve: (*Sharp*) 'Cause you make out that you *know* everythin'. And you don't.

Pause.

Caroline: Say what you think.

Steve: How come you 'ave an answer for everythin'?

Silence.

Very funny.

Caroline: Get it? You asked why I had an answer for everything and I didn't answer. Get it?

Steve: Yeah. I got it.

Caroline: (*Comes up behind him*) Aww. Are you in a sulk now?

Steve: What is it?

Caroline: Huh?

Steve: The way I look? 'Ow I speak?

Caroline: Steve.

Steve: Or is it just that everythin' 'bout me is so pathetic that it's so fuckin' funny?

Caroline: Steve. Don't be –

Steve: Don't, Caroline!

Caroline: Steve.

Steve: Don't tell me 'ow I should be.

Caroline: (*Defensively*) Alright.

Steve: It's your fault we're back 'ere. I was doin' well. And now I'm back where I fuckin' started. Do you know 'ow that feels? And I'm tryin' my damned 'ardest to make things better – tryin' to make good of this – shit. Be as 'appy as we can be. But it's as if you don't wanna be 'appy.

Caroline: It's hard.

Steve: It ain't.

Caroline: It –

Steve: (*Firmer*) It ain't. Ain't as 'ard as you're makin' it. You just don't want things to be different, do you? You don't wanna move on. And so *I* can't move on. And that's fuckin' selfish, y'know?

Caroline: Steve. I know it's slow. And I know it's frustrating – *I'm* frustrating. But it'll all work out, eventually. (*Pause*) Trust me.

Steve *just looks at her.*

Steve: Not again.

Caroline *kisses Steve but he doesn't react. She kisses him again.*

Caroline: Let's go to bed.

Steve: I don't feel like sleepin'.

Caroline: I wasn't thinking about sleeping.

Caroline *kisses him but Steve physically resists.*

Make love to me. (*Pause*) I won't fake it this time.

Pause.

Steve: Promise?

Caroline: Promise.

Silence. Steve just looks at her. He then prises her off him, turns away and walks slowly, emotionally drained, to the door. He grabs his coat, and exits the apartment. Caroline, completely de-motivated, drags herself to the kitchen. She turns on the tap but then sinks to the floor. She curls up in a sort of foetal position in the corner of the cabinets and begins to sob – the sound of running water behind her.

Ian enters from the bedroom with the remnants of **Jason**'s meal.

Ian: I love you too. You try to have a little nap now. Rest.

He walks to the sink, ignoring Caroline at his feet. He throws the stuff in the sink and allows them to soak, water running. He slumps down next to Caroline, hugging his knees to his chest. He continues to speak into the other room.

It's so tiring. I know. So tiring just turning stale in here – all the baggage. Wouldn't think it, would you? That such a mind numbing life was so bloody exhausting. (*Calls to Jason*) Sorry. That was a shit choice of words. Mind numbing. It just came out.

I can't believe it got to this.

We'll die in here. You first, obviously. If I could change that, I would, but I can't. Then it'll be me. Gone. Just like that. As if I contributed nothing. (*Thinks momentarily*) Shit. I haven't. I've contributed fuck all. God. That's a scary thought. So many years, footsteps, breaths and what to show for it? Fuck all.

I'm hearing things. Yeah. Crazy. Screaming.

Caroline, still huddled in the corner, becomes agitated and covers her ears with her hands.

Caroline: (*Muttering*) Stop. Please, stop.

Ian: There's a load of different screams. Like a fucking collection. Like someone has bottled fucking screams. And the scariest, craziest thing is that I swear one of them is my own.

He screams. No sound comes out. He covers his mouth with his hand, takes a deep breath in to try and stop himself from crying. A tear still leaks out. He shakes and shivers.

Christ. Why is it so fucking cold? So fucking cold – all of the shitting time. Are you cold? Do you need a blanket? (*Pause*) Are you asleep? (*Pause*) Of course you are. Stupid question.

Suddenly motivated, Ian springs up, turns the tap off and excitedly raids the cupboards and the fridge for sauces. As he does so, Caroline pulls herself to her feet. Slowly and with painful effort.

I'm gonna do it! Paint! Paint my prize fucking work. Yeah. Now! Yeah. Right now! It'll make me a household name. Famous! Groundbreaking – re-define the whole concept of post-modern art. The – AVANT GARDE!

*He places all the jars and bottles on a filthy, stained tray and carries it to the coffee table. He begins to rummage and rifle under the sofa to retrieve his easel, canvas and paintbrushes. At the same time, **Caroline** crosses to a small dresser by the door and tries the top drawer. It's jammed.*

Ian and Caroline: Arsehole!

Caroline gives a little, pathetic kick to a leg of the dresser and then just drops to the floor where she is, as if her legs have disappeared beneath her. She finds herself in an uncomfortable, twisted position but doesn't alter it. She buries her face in the floor and remains still. **Ian** continues gathering his things. He stops to think now and again.

Ian: (To the room) Such a cold, disgusting, rotting little hovel. Like a damp, hairy, tight, stinking arsehole. Stuck in the crack. Or a fanny. More like a slimy fanny. With warts. My front half in. Back end out, legs flailing about. Looking like a complete cock. (Beat) I'm a cock – in a fanny – with – legs.

And the fanny just breathes. Breathing down my neck. SHAFT. Yes, stick with the metaphor. Good metaphor. Must stick with it. (Calls) Yes? (Beat) Yes. Good metaphor. Breathing down my – SHAFT. Making my skin crawl with CUNTISH damp.

*Having obtained everything, **Ian** sets up his workspace. Quickly.*

It feels like I'm growing mould – just gradually getting covered by it. I'll be bound up by it, by – by LIFE. Young, aggressive, suffocating – LIFE. It'll clamp around my lungs, close off my throat with thick, knowing blackness. And that'll be it. FUCK. A life for a life.

Finally, he balances his canvas on the easel. And then – stops.

Why me, eh? (Suddenly howls) Why me?!

In a sudden burst of anger, he strikes his canvas and easel to the floor with one manic arm movement. He quickly pulls himself together and gathers the easel and canvas. He calls into the bedroom, apologetically.

Oh, I'm sorry, buddy. I didn't mean to wake you. You know me. I get carried away. (Beat) Yeah, you're a fuckwit too! (Beat) I know you didn't say it. It would be a fucking miracle if you did. But I know you were thinking it. And you meant it. (Beat) Oh, just fuck off and go back to sleep!

He pauses for a moment to prepare himself and his thoughts, stepping back slightly from the canvas to gain perspective. He then plunges into his work – washing the canvas in HP.

You hate this place too, don't you? Jason?! We could leave, couldn't we? We could. Get out of this shit hole for good. We can't though. It's become a bit of a – crutch. It's so fucking

shit, so fucking infuriating but you can't bear to leave it; you still need it. Like Facebook. Or the X Factor. This place – it caught us at our weakest, didn't it? FUCK. Why did we let it? Why did we let our fucking guards down? (*Beat*) I know why. I remember us then. Broke. Still are. Yeah, you have your spaz money and I have my sucker money but it's still not enough.

He washes his brush in a jar of water, dips it in another sauce and attacks the canvas again.

Yeah, I checked the account this morning. Fucking pissed myself – scared me that fucking much!

Pause then continues painting.

I'm sure we could survive. Do you think? Out there. Thing is, these four walls won't let us go. Will they? They know we need them. I need you. You need me. And without them, there wouldn't be an US. They know that. Your folks would just have discarded you in some shit little nursing home. I wouldn't have been here to stop them. So instead of me, there'd be some miserable, incompetent, Eastern-European bitch patronising you with pleasantries. You'd love that wouldn't you? And I'd be on some street corner, doodling on the pavement, hanging on like a naïve little schoolboy for something just to – happen.

But that's what I *am* doing, isn't it? Waiting. For something to happen. But not out there. In here. Hidden away. Worth FUCK – ALL.

Ian *steps back to survey the piece so far.*

Right. That's the base done. Now for subject.

He stands further back.

I can see her now. My muse. Yeah. I can see her.

He attacks the canvas; splashes the 'paint' on thickly and slapdash.

Scrunched-up, bulldog face. Sour. Unfeeling. Unwanted. Unapproachable.

Yeah, this could work! This could really work!

Yes! At an exhibition. The Tate Modern. Yeah, they'd like it. And she'd just be there. In everybody's faces.

Sickening.

Suffocating.

Provoking.

Fucking bitch.

Supervisor? My fucking supervisor? Fucking cunt!

Can't even fucking communicate.

Can't relate.

Can't do anything but fucking scrounge and mope and grumble and look down her piggish nose at everyone.

At me!

How dare she!

Cunt.

That's it This is good. Inspired! Great!

I'm better.

I'm so much better than her.

But she's above – a fucking dead weight –

A dead weight.

On me.

On society.

A plague.

Feasting.

Greedy fucking bitch.

Sucking.

Laughing at us.

Robbing us.

Robbing me.

Robbing you!

Living in fucking luxury compared to this.

Living like a Queen.

A fucking Polish Queen in this fucking country.

Filthy, little slag raping our country.

Slimy.

Sly.

Revolting – little – CUNT.

Ian steps back again, observes his work and then, suddenly, he drops his paintbrush and drives his hand straight through the canvas. He screams and throws the canvas down on the ground, stamping and kicking it to shreds.

FUCK! SHIT! It's all fucking SHIT! (*Frustrated scream*) I'm good. Aren't I? I know I'm good. But no one wants to know. I deserve more. I deserve so much more. But I'm just a nothing. A good for nothing piece of hopeless FUCKING SHIT!

He screams and takes his anger out on himself – punches and slaps his head manically. He breathes uncontrollably. He drops to his knees and just looks out, tears in his eyes.

I can see him laughing. Dean Hayworth. I can see him now. Fucking howling down at me. Good job. Loadsa money. Aston Martin. Amazing sex – filthy whore of a wife. Massive house, electric gates, swimming pool.

Yeah. Go on! Have a good fucking laugh! I can see you! I know. Yeah. I'm a useless fucking piece of fucking shit!

He breaks down – huddles and cries. Then suddenly stops and looks up.

Or ... a genius.

On hands and knees, he reaches under the sofa and pulls out a tripod and camera case. He jumps up and carries the equipment to the bedroom.

Jason! Thank you! That's genius!

*He disappears into the bedroom. With that, **Steve** hurls himself from the bedroom into the living area. Apart from being bloodied, sweaty and frantic, he looks smarter in his dress than before. He makes for the front door but he stumbles and falls to the ground. He is evidently terrified and cries and breathes heavily.*

Graham follows calmly from the bedroom. He walks towards **Steve**. **Steve** tries to make a run for it. He throws himself towards the front door but **Graham** grabs a hold of **Steve**'s shirt to stop him. **Steve** pulls free and with one sharp movement, grabs the door handle and opens the door. **Graham** grabs him again with more effort this time but **Steve** grips onto the door frame and refuses to let go. They both struggle. With his foot, **Graham** slams the door shut against **Steve**'s fingers. **Steve** screams as he loses his grip. **Graham** grabs him around the middle and carries him kicking and screaming towards the bathroom. One of **Steve**'s

*frantic kicks strikes **Graham** in the leg, hard. **Graham** drops **Steve** to the floor to nurse his leg. **Steve** scrambles on all fours towards the door but **Graham** quickly gains composure. He grabs **Steve**'s leg and pulls him defiantly into the bathroom.*

*The phone rings. **Caroline** drags herself up from the floor. She crosses to the phone on the dresser and answers it.*

Caroline: *(Softly)* Hello?

Pause.

Steve. Where –

Pause.

I'm sorry too. I'm so sorry. I can't – I'm just – I –

Pause.

Yeah. OK. I love you too.

Caroline replaces the receiver. The answer phone light flashes, bouncing red light onto other surfaces around the room. **Caroline** presses a button and crosses to the sofa. She sits down and turns on the TV. She becomes totally oblivious to the answer phone although it plays louder than the TV's background noise.

Electronic Voice: You have – SEVEN –

Black.

Scene Two.

*Lights flicker on. **Caroline** remains on the sofa watching TV. A few additions to the scene; one can of peas and a can of processed tomato soup on the coffee table and a bright pink handbag on the sofa.*

Steve: *(From the bathroom)* Billion.

Electronic Voice: New messages.

Caroline: What?

Steve: *(Calls – aside)* Seven billion people on earth. "Eard it on the radio today.

Caroline: Oh right.

Steve: Seems more than that, dunnit?

Caroline: I suppose.

Steve: Yeah, seven billion is a lot. But it just seems tiny when you think how massive the world is.

Caroline: It's the seven.

Steve: Yeah. That's what I thought. Such a small number. So it still seems small even with a billion after it. If it were twenty-two or – thirty. That would sound much better.

Silence. Electronic beep.

A series of screams play out, male and female, young and old, each separated by an electronic beep. Caroline mimes to one – her own. The seventh, a young girl's, is the most chilling.

Electronic Voice: You have no more messages.

Long beep.

From the bathroom, Steve screams in excruciating pain and paralysing fear.

Beat.

Caroline: Did you say something?

Beat.

Steve: No. Why?

Caroline: Thought I heard something.

Steve: Wasn't me.

Caroline goes back to staring at the TV. She picks up the can of peas and a spoon from the coffee table and spoons the peas into her mouth.

It's funny.

Caroline: What?

Steve: Bein' 'ere.

Caroline: Get to the point, Steve.

Steve: We're up 'ere. In the sky. But so many people. An 'ole city in the sky.

Caroline: Well that was the whole point. High rise living, remember?

Steve: So many people; either side, above, below. But such a lonely place. Just – cut off. From the rest of – civilisation –

Caroline: Big word.

Steve: (*Proudly*) Learnt it today. (*Pause*) We step through that door and we’re – nothin’. And no one will hear us scream. Or pretend they never did. Or just let it wash over ‘em – like background noise. So many lives. Up ‘ere. But worth nothin’. Up ‘ere.

Caroline: You’re thinking too much.

The flush goes and Steve comes out into the living room. He wipes his hands in his grubby T-shirt – he’s looking dishevelled again and there’s no blood or wound in sight. He sits down next to Caroline and picks up the can of soup and a spoon. They watch the TV and eat. Zombified, Caroline spoons some peas from her can into Steve’s and Steve takes some of his soup and spoons it into Caroline’s peas. They continue to eat.

Steve turns the TV off.

Caroline: I was watching that!

Steve: I just wanna talk.

Long pause.

Caroline: Go on then. Or did you interrupt my programme for nothing?

Steve: That wan’t your programme.

Caroline: Yes it was.

Steve: It ain’t. Your programme is –

Caroline: I have many programmes. I like television. Now get on with it.

Silence.

Pub tonight?

Steve: Nah. Went down after work. Quick game of pool with Mickey.

Caroline: Oh. Mickey? How *is* Mickey?

Steve: Good. Took Gerry for ‘er scan today.

Caroline: I can’t believe she’s having another one. What’s that now? Third? Fourth?

Steve: Fifth.

Caroline: Shit.

Steve: She's gonna pop pretty soon.

Caroline: Hopefully she'll pop completely and then I won't have to see her again. She doesn't deserve Mickey.

Steve: Yeah. But try tellin' Mickey that.

Caroline: Mug.

Pause.

We should try.

Silence. Steve just looks at her.

What?

No response.

What?

Steve: Are you - ? After –

Caroline: Steve –

Steve: Everythin'?

Caroline: How does that make me a bad mother?

Steve: I didn't–

Caroline: Yes you did.

Steve: No. I – (*Pause*) It's – it's just–

Caroline: What?

Steve: I –

Caroline: Go on.

Steve: What'd people think?

Caroline: Who cares what people think?

Steve: *I* do.

Caroline: Yeah. Well, you've always done that.

Steve: Where the hell was this come from?

Caroline: Well it's natural – isn't it?

Steve: Yeah. But why – why now?

Caroline: I just thought –

Steve: What?

Caroline: Let me speak, Steve! *(Beat)* I thought we were moving somewhere. OK? I thought we were – moving – somewhere.

Long pause.

Steve: *(Laughs)* What does that even mean?

Caroline: Cheers.

Steve: Sorry.

Caroline: No. It's fine. Laugh in my face. I'm used to it.

Steve stops laughing. Long pause.

Steve: OK. Let's forget about what other people'd think. What about what the kid'd think? They're gonna get torn apart at school. Kids are cruel. *You* know. Would you be OK with lettin' an innocent little life get mixed up in all of –

Caroline: Mixed up?

Steve: Oh, I dunno. Not mixed up. I'm just – I – they could end up eating –

Caroline: Me.

Steve: I was gonna say „us“.

Caroline: You're right. Ridiculed. Ashamed. Twisted freak for a mother.

Steve: You're not –

Caroline: That's what people see me as though, isn't it? And that's what he'll hear. That's what he'll be told.

Steve: *(Pause – then smiles)* He?

Caroline: What?

Steve: *(Smiling)* You said “e.

Caroline: Did I?

Steve: You know you did.

Steve grips Caroline’s hand and they smile widely.

Caroline: Our little boy.

They suddenly regain composure and separate.

We shouldn’t–

Steve: No.

Caroline: It could never happen.

Pause.

Steve: I didn’t say *never*.

Caroline: No?

Steve: Take it slow. Get jobs first. New ‘ouse.

Caroline: Yeah.

Long silence.

Steve: *(Softly)* We’ll die in ‘ere.

Caroline: I know.

Pause.

Steve and Caroline: You’ll die first.

Awkward pause.

Steve: Why do you say that?

Caroline: Just a feeling.

Silence. Steve starts to scratch at a stain on his T-shirt.

Everything was going so well.

Steve: *(Still scratching)* Yeah. Brilliant. Three years. Three amazin' years.

Caroline: Yeah. But stalled now. Sat here. And that's it

Steve *suddenly stops with his shirt and turns to look at Caroline.*

Steve: You're gettin' down.

Caroline: Oh?

Steve: Uh huh.

Caroline: Well, yeah, I suppose I am – down – a little.

Steve: At least you're going.

Caroline: Huh?

Steve: The interviews.

Caroline: Oh yeah. Of course. At least I'm doing that.

Steve: Oh! And you know I was with Mickey?

Caroline: Yeah.

Steve: Well we were talkin' –

Caroline: You didn't –

Steve: I just –

Caroline: Steve. I told you I didn't want any favours.

Steve: I know. But –

Caroline: I can do it on my own.

Steve: I –

Caroline: I can find my own work.

Steve: I ain't –

Caroline: I feel useless enough as it is without you handing my future over to your friends.

Steve: I ain't –

Caroline: And Mickey of all people. For some reason, I wasn't aware that waste disposal provided hopeful career prospects. And besides, fluorescent colours don't suit me.

Steve: He 'as – connections.

Caroline: (*Laughs*) Steve, the only connection Mickey is familiar with is between his finger and his nostril.

Caroline *continues to laugh.*

Steve: (*Serious*) That ain't funny. He 'as a – condition.

Caroline *laughs more.*

Caroline!

Caroline: Alright. Just. Look. Seriously now. I don't think we should be relying on Mickey for career development. OK?

Steve: OK. Just thought it could be another –

Caroline: Opportunity. Yeah. I'm grateful, really.

Silence.

Steve *gets up.*

Steve: It kills me. That I can't provide for you.

Caroline: (*Empathetically*) Steve.

Caroline *quickly gets up and crosses to him.*

You *do* provide for me.

Caroline *holds him. She tries to look at him but he looks at the floor.*

Steve. Look. Look at me.

She holds his head firm to look at her.

I don't deserve *anything* from you. I don't know why you stick around.

Steve: Car –

Caroline: But you do. And that's –

Steve: There's –

Caroline: EVERYTHING at the moment.

Steve: I got sacked.

Pause – the news is so abrupt. They look at each other. Silence. And then Caroline slaps Steve across the face, hard.

Steve: Fuck! Caroline? What the FUCK!

Caroline paces the living area.

Caroline: You are such a fucking idiot! Only you could go and lose your job NOW. Of all FUCKING times. Girlfriend doomed to never work again, living in fucking squalor, eating like fucking peasants and out of all the fucking idiots in that shitty little outfit, you have to be the one who goes and gets himself fucking sacked!

Steve: I didn't–

Caroline: How are we going to feed ourselves, now? Eh? Lick the fucking mould off the fucking ceiling? Or maybe I could just eat *you* because at present I would do anything to get you out of my fucking sight!

Long silence.

Steve walks to the door and grabs his coat.

Steve: (*Mutters*) You get a job "en and fend for yourself, you selfish fuckin" bitch.

Steve exits.

Caroline goes after him, yearning for a fight.

Caroline: What did you say? Don't you fucking –

The door slams in her face. Caroline doesn't follow. She slams her fist hard against the door.

Fuck!

She rests her head on the door. She breaks down. Crying, she sinks to the floor and sits, head in her hands, back against the door.

Pause.

Caroline calms as **Steve** speaks from the other side of the door.

Steve: (*Soft*) I'm sorry.

Caroline: What?

Steve: *(Slightly louder)* I'm sorry.

Caroline: *(Pause)* Don't be.

Steve: They just couldn't afford us all.

Caroline: Obviously.

Pause.

Steve: I went to the Job Centre. Some agencies too. Joined the lists. Long lists.

Caroline: Thousands?

Steve: Yeah. Loads. *(Pause)* Receptionist at one – young girl she was – she said she definitely couldn't promise nothin'. But – 'opefully. Could be lucky. I ain't fussy. Am I?

Long pause.

Caroline: You found out today?

Steve: *(Pause)* No. Couple of days ago. *(Beat)* More like a week. I couldn't tell you straight away. Just – couldn't.

Caroline: That explains the pea and soup diet then.

Steve: *(Pause)* Yeah, I –

Caroline: Makes sense now.

Steve: I tried –

Caroline: You've joined Phil and Holly too.

Pause.

Steve: I won't stay at 'ome much. Won't get under your feet. I'll go out. Job Centre, Library, y'know –

Silence.

Can I come back in?

Caroline *gets up and steps away from the door.*

Caroline: Sure.

Long pause.

Steve: Umm. I forgot my key.

Caroline *crosses to the door and lets Steve in.*

Thanks.

Caroline *shuts the door and remains standing by it. Steve hangs up his coat. Awkward pause.*

Caroline: I got a tattoo.

Steve: Really?

Caroline: Yeah. Today. I went out.

Steve: How much it cost?

Caroline: Twenty quid.

Steve: And you keep complainin' 'bout money?

Caroline: You'll like it. I think.

Caroline *shuffles towards Steve. She winces a little as she rolls up the sleeve of her jumper. She shows Steve her cling-filmed wrist.*

Steve: *(Reads) Steven. (Beat – looks at her) Steven? (Pause – slight smile) It's nice.*

Caroline: The love heart was the most painful.

Steve: It's nice. Thanks.

Caroline: I like it too. I was a little unsure at first but it's growing on me. Simple. Not too tacky. *(Pause)* I spoke to mum today.

Steve: Oh yeah?

Caroline: Yeah. She told me off.

Steve: For what?

Caroline: She said „Stop treating Steve like shit. You're lucky to have him“. Do you know what *I* said?

Steve: What?

Caroline: I said „Mum, you're behind the times. I stopped treating Steve like shit a few weeks ago“

*They laugh, **Caroline** more than **Steve**.*

If she saw me tonight, she wouldn't believe me.

Long pause – they stare at each other.

Steve: You look hot.

Awkward pause. They laugh.

Silence.

The jumper suits you.

Caroline plays with the bottom of her jumper.

Caroline: Yeah?

*Pause. **Caroline** becomes cringingly flirtatious.*

Better with it off?

Pause.

They burst out laughing.

Pause.

*They step coyly towards each other. They kiss tenderly. Then more passionately. **Steve** pulls **Caroline**'s jumper over her head and they sink down behind the sofa. Their clothes are thrown over into view – **Caroline**'s bra, and her joggers, **Steve**'s shirt. And then **Caroline**'s knickers. And then flung over the back of the sofa is another bra and another pair of knickers and another man's shirt.*

Pause. Just the sound of heavy breathing – uncertainty as to whether it is with pleasure or pain.

Graham stands up from behind the sofa in just his trousers, no shirt. He is dishevelled, out of breath, and his arms and areas of his face are covered in blood. He gathers the second bra and second pair of knickers from the sofa and other items of women's clothing from behind it. He drags himself to the kitchen and drops the clothing in the sink. He pours a little whiskey onto them and then with a lighter from the surface, sets them alight. He just watches the flames for a while until he turns on the tap and begins to wash himself thoroughly and meticulously.

Graham: That was your fault.

He turns off the tap, wipes his hands in his jeans. He grabs the bright pink handbag from the sofa and begins to root through it.

You know he was just using you, don't you? You could say I was saving you from him. You should have known better, Sarah. (*Blurts out*) I'm sorry. No! I'm not sorry. That was your fault. It was – your – it was. There was no other way. You did – YOU – you did that.

Pause.

Right. We should get you tidied up.

Graham eventually brings out a small makeup bag. He disappears back down behind the sofa to apply the mask to the body.

Steve: (*From behind the sofa*) Christ!

Long pause. Caroline appears from behind the sofa, rising onto her knees. She is dressed in a bright green supermarket overall which is, at present, out-of-shape and half undone. Her hair is ruffled and she's a little flustered.

Steve pulls himself to sitting. He too looks dishevelled. He stands up. He's dressed in an old T-shirt and trousers which are undone. He zips them up. **Steve** smiles at **Caroline**.

Caroline: Happy?

Steve: Uh huh.

Caroline: So you should be.

Caroline grabs her coat and handbag from near the door.

I'm off.

Steve: I'll walk you.

Caroline: No. I'll get the bus.

Steve: I'll walk you to the bus stop then.

Caroline: No need.

Steve: I want to.

Caroline: Steve. I like my own space sometimes.

Pause.

Go for a drink with Mickey, yeah?

Steve: He's with the baby. It's OK. I like my own space too.

Caroline: I've got to go.

Steve: Have fun.

Caroline: Stacking shelves. Yeah. Right.

Caroline exits.

Steve lies back down on the floor and disappears behind the sofa.

Graham stands up from behind the sofa, **Ian** limp in his arms. **Ian** wears a torn, bloodied dress, a blonde wig and his face has been literally plastered in makeup. **Graham** carries him off into the bathroom.

The flat remains empty. The light goes out. Dark. From nowhere, the red light on the answer phone begins to flash. Apart from street and moon light, it is the only other source of light in the room.

Caroline enters from the bathroom, wrapped only in a minuscule towel and her wet hair bunched up on the top of her head in a much more substantial towel. She sits down on the sofa, grabs a magazine and starts to flick through it, feet up on the coffee table.

*Dissatisfied with the magazine, **Caroline** drops it back down on the coffee table with a bored grunt. She then begins to examine her fingers.*

Caroline: (Giggles) They're still wrinkly. (Giggles again)

Steve appears in the bedroom doorway, naked apart from a towel wrapped around his waist. He has wet hair and has a coffee mug gripped in his hand. He peers through the dark at **Caroline**.

Steve: Caroline. Get dressed. You'll be late.

Caroline: In a minute.

Steve: What's wrong? Why –

Caroline: Just thinking.

Steve: 'Bout what?

Caroline: Us.

Steve crosses to sit next to **Caroline**.

Ian pushes **Graham** out from the bedroom in a wheelchair. **Ian** is dressed as normal. **Graham**'s clothes are ripped. He is bleeding in several places, the most prominent being from his right arm. **Ian** parks him next to the sofa and sits down on the floor in front of him. He looks out.

Ian: (*Quietly*) Look at us, Jase. It's like we're the only ones left. On the entire planet.

Steve: Us?

Ian: Just you and me, Jason.

Caroline: Yes.

A whistle of a familiar tune from outside, coming closer to the door. And then a key in the door. The door begins to open and the whistle gets louder.

All of us.

Suddenly, the chip pan on the hob bursts into flame.

Black out.

Interval.

Scene Three.

*A grimy and rusty old bath tub. **Caroline** is sat in it. She is wet and soapy. Over the top of the bath lie limbs from bodies inside. One of them is a duplicate of **Caroline**'s own tattooed arm but she seems oblivious to what seems to be surrounding her.*

Caroline: When I was little. I had so many dreams. So much I wanted to do with my life. First, I wanted to be a doctor. Mum says I came out of the womb wanting to be a doctor. Makes sense. Because that's the first thing I remember saying, „I want to be a doctor“. I don't know why I was so obsessed. I wasn't even particularly science-minded. But then, that seemed to be my whole world. It's funny how kids have these ideas of life – from nowhere. Mum and dad just played along. Supported me – even then. At that age. One Christmas, they bought all the gear. Stethoscope, white coat. And I had a full-scale skeleton model standing in the corner of my bedroom. I know. Weird. And one of those big, plastic heads which you can open up and take out all the different parts. I found it all so – fascinating.

And then, suddenly, it just changed. Don't even remember why or how. I think I just watched Ready Steady Cook one evening and then immediately wanted to be a TV Chef. Ainsley Harriot was my favourite. My role model. He had names for his salt and pepper, didn't he? What did he call them again? Wasn't it Suzie Salt? Yes, that's right. And Percy Pepper. (*Laughs*) Hilarious. And he'd do a funny little dance when he used them too. He'd stand away from the surface, hold his arm out, head a little tilted backwards, and then he'd wiggle his hips a bit.

She imitates the movement and then laughs.

It was so funny. I remember we'd all sit there and watch it. Me, mum, dad, even my brother. And when he came on, we'd all do his little salt and pepper dance, sat there on the sofa and we'd just laugh. So much.

And then I suddenly grew up. It's funny how all of a sudden that happens. I woke up one morning and it's as if I'd decided in my sleep that it was time to be – realistic. That all those dreams of doctor and TV chef were just not feasible anymore. And suddenly I decided that I wanted to teach. Don't even know why. Don't know where that came from. But that was it. That's all I wanted. It was as if that idea had just been planted in my brain. And it all just suddenly made sense. Good money. Stable future. Busy weekends what with all the lesson planning and stuff, but good holidays. Very good holidays.

I was so proud. Not just of myself. But of the job. Of the people. Of the kids. I loved that job.

Steve enters, shaving with an electric razor. He's just in a towel, wrapped around his waist.

Steve: I know.

Caroline: And I was good, wasn't I?

Steve: Very good. You could've done so well. You could've been head. One day.

Caroline: No. Thanks. But no. I was just happy in the classroom with the kids.

Steve kneels down at the side of the bath tub.

Steve: They woulda loved you in New Zealand. Teachers were in demand. They woulda snapped you up.

Caroline: You think?

Steve: Uh-huh.

Caroline: I should have done that. Been brave like you. Grasped the opportunity. We definitely wouldn't be in this mess now

Steve: It's a mess, alright.

Caroline: You shouldn't have come back. You had –

Steve: I had a kid. I couldn't have just stayed out there knowing that he was there. Just – wouldn't have felt – right.

Caroline: But after. *(Pause)* When you – lost – when you lost him. You could have gone back.

Steve: I could have.

Caroline: So why not? You could have had – everything.

Steve: Not you.

*They look at each other intensely and then laugh. **Caroline** hits **Steve** on the arm.*

Caroline: Soft git.

Pause.

Steve: How's your bath?

Caroline: *(Sighs)* Amazing.

Steve: Better than a shower?

Caroline: No question.

Steve: Urgh. There's just somin' about sitting in your own filth that just doesn't wash with me.

Beat. They laugh.

Steve and Caroline: *Wash* with me.

Caroline: Pun. Very good.

Steve: Yeah. It was good, wannit? Didn't even think 'bout it.

Steve stops shaving and turns the razor off.

Caroline: So you wouldn't want to join me then?

Steve: What?

Caroline: As you hate baths so much, I take it you don't want to –

*Steve jumps to his feet and rips off the towel. **Caroline** laughs.*

Thought not.

*Steve gets into the bath, pushing past all the limbs, oblivious to their presence. He settles down opposite **Caroline**.*

Steve: Coulda made it warmer.

Caroline: Are you complaining?

Steve: No.

Caroline: Yes you are. You're a guest in this bath. Best behaviour, please.

They smile at each other. Pause. They lock eyes.

Steve: You look beautiful.

Caroline: So do you.

Steve: That's a first. A beautiful car mechanic.

Caroline: *Ex* car mechanic.

Silence.

Steve: Really?

Caroline: Sorry. I don't know why I said that.

Steve: Me neither.

Awkward silence. Caroline splashes water at him. No response from Steve. Caroline splashes him again and again. Pause. Steve suddenly joins in and they compete until they give up and lie back.

How long do you think you can hold your breath?

Caroline: As long as you.

Steve: Two minutes, then?

Caroline: Easy.

Steve: OK. Ready? One.

Caroline: Two.

Steve and Caroline: Three.

They both slide out of sight into the bath.

Silence.

Ian suddenly emerges through the limbs and gasps for breath. He sits in the bath, dripping wet, and shivers.

Ian: I don't know how it got to this. I was just doing what I thought was best for us. Trying to make us – more. Wasn't I? That's all I was trying to do. Jase? Jase? Jason?

He slides back down into the bath and disappears.

Steve pops up and starts coughing. *Pause. And then Caroline emerges.*

Caroline: *(Raises her arms in the air)* Victor!

Steve: Alright. Alright. The soap was too strong.

Caroline: Excuses.

Caroline *leans back and sighs.*

Did I get to two minutes?

Steve: Dunno. Wasn't timin'.

Caroline: Oh. Right. So it was a bit of a pointless exercise then.

Steve: Yep.

Caroline: It felt like about two minutes.

Steve: Yeah. Probably was.

Caroline *examines her hands.*

Caroline: Are your fingers wrinkly?

Steve: *(Looks at his hands)* Yep.

Caroline: *(Laughs)* They look funny.

Steve: *(Laughs at his)* Yeah.

Long pause.

Caroline: I'd better get ready for work.

Steve: Yeah.

Caroline: Or I'll be late.

Steve: Yeah.

Caroline: This is too nice though.

Steve: Yeah.

Caroline: Maybe just a couple more minutes.

Pause.

Steve: *(Grins)* Yeah.

They relax down into the bath and disappear from view.

Graham enters and slumps down on the floor. He is barefooted and starts to rip the dead skin off the bottoms of his feet, discarding it on the floor.

Graham: *(Soft)* It's quiet. Never known it to be so quiet. Not even the sound of the boiler. Not even those sounds you think you hear. When you're alone. When you search for things to frighten you. *(Pause)* I wonder why it's decided to be so quiet now. This place usually breathes.

Graham glances fleetingly over at the bath tub, the limbs hanging over it as he rips off another bit of skin.

Do you want to hear my theory? Do you? Well – I think. Are you listening? I think it's because it's – waiting. Yeah, I know. How can a building wait? But then how can a building breathe? And it does, doesn't it? You can feel it. It's waiting – it's waiting to be – relieved. Y'see, it's holding too much. More than it's ever done. Too much to contain within such fragile walls, at such a precarious, volatile height. It can't cope. So it's waiting – just – waiting – to be allowed – to – breathe – again.

Pause – another bit of skin ripped off. He continues to rip at his feet.

It must feel strange. Me talking to you. You must despise me and here I am confiding in you. I just needed someone to talk to. You're the only people who'll listen. Yes, I suppose you don't have a choice. But I'm grateful. I am. *(Pause)* I've gone on for so long – doing this – till now – it doesn't seem to mean anything. I never used to question it. I just sort of – did it. It all just sort of happened. Yes, you can ask me why. But I couldn't give you a reason. I thought I knew. But now – I'm not sure.

How can someone go on doing something so – poisonous? So – destructive. And not realise. Or realise – and fail to feel any different. How thick must your skin be to carry on like that? How thick with mist must the inside of your brain be to let your body go on – regardless? So much fog. So much skin. So much cover to so little bone.

He rips another bit of skin off his foot and instead of dropping it to the floor, opens his mouth slightly and places it on his tongue. He swallows. He picks up a few more pieces and feeds them into his mouth one by one.

I'm hungry. But not for food. No. Just for – something – for something – just – more. Yes, just for something more than this.

It's inevitable in the end. Isn't it? That one day, you look at the person you hate more than anything, anyone else – and it's – yes, it's YOU. And that wide-eyed moment of SHIT, OK, SHIT happens. But then you suddenly come to terms with it. Don't you? Like it's been planted in your brain. But also like it was always meant to be. And you realise how thick you've been. You should have seen it sooner. You really should have known that this would be the way. That one day, you'd be looking out of the window and actually, for the first time, really notice your reflection. Properly take note of that person staring back at you. And it just

sinks in. Doesn't it? Don't you think? You realise that it's – YOU. And all that hate was meant for you. No. *The* YOU – that thing inside of you. The thing which lives beneath your skin. The thing you think is you. But are you actually sure? Totally sure. And you're not. Are you? No. You're definitely not. And that scares you more than anything. Because you thought you knew what you were doing, and why. But if the YOU is something else entirely, then you're just a lodger, to a thing you hardly know. A thing you'll never understand – the self – and then, suddenly, what you do loses all relevance. All meaning. And for the first time in your whole entire life, you're just not sure – about any of it.

He comes up onto his knees and looks down on the little pile of skin. He blows on the pile and the little pieces float and scatter.

Black.

Scene Four.

Lights are on in the apartment. The place is empty.

A whistling is heard outside the door – the same familiar tune as before. It gets louder as the whistler approaches. A key is heard in the door and then it opens. The whistling is at its fullest. Ian enters, still whistling. He lets the door slam behind him.

Ian: Hey. You alright? Cine-fucking-world today. Cleaning toilets. How was it? SHIT. *(Laughs)* Sorry. I couldn't help myself. How was your day?

Ian drops down on the sofa.

I know it's a stupid question but I'm being polite, OK? *(Pause)* Yeah, me, polite. No, I know it doesn't happen very often. So make the most of it then.

As usual, he starts to roll a spliff on the coffee table.

I'll just have a smoke and then I'll be in to see you. *(Pause)* What did you say? *(Pause)* Hmm, you'd better not have. I deserve this. Been a long day. Fucking stressful. Had police and social services on to me. That made a good first impression at work. They came barging in, asking this kid at the desk where Ian Jeffries was. Fucking humiliating. As if working in that place wasn't humiliating enough.

Pause as Ian lights up and smokes. He begins to pace the room.

They'd had complaints from people. Yeah. About the video. On the blog. So now they're – investigating. Investigating? I told them – it's ART. Can't you see that? Social worker just looked at me awkward – didn't really know what to say. Police officer – fit blonde type she was – bimbo; massive tits, face full of make-up – only went into the police force so she could get touched up – she just looked at me cold. Fucking cold. At *me*. Who do they think they are? I asked them that. „Who the hell do you think you are?“ I gave it to them straight. I'm an artist. I have things to say. A society to comment on – people to stand up for. That's all it is. A representation of hidden issues, ignored people. That's all I'm doing. There's nothing wrong there. Is there?

Because you've been ignored most of your fucking life, haven't you, Jase? What a waste. What a fucking terrible waste. That's what people are thinking. About you. People look at you in that wheelchair, slobbering all over the fucking place and they think good for nothing, waste of time and money, might as well be dead. Because what sort of a life is that, after all? If what you have can actually be regarded as a life. That's what people think, isn't it?

I think more of you than that, of course. I look at you and I see a – human being. I listen to you and understand. I understand every little nonsensical mutter you make. And that's why we're good together. Me and you. There's a mutual understanding. We know the scary, fucked up nature of this horrible little world and we know that to get through it, we can't do it on our own. That's right, isn't it? That's how you feel too, right? Yeah. I understand. More than anyone. And yet I'm the one who's being – investigated.

I told them the truth. I told them it was your idea. I said that you gave me permission. That you encouraged me to do it. And it's obvious from the film that you were enjoying it. They didn't believe me. I told them to come and ask you for themselves, but they just looked at me. Said nothing. „He can fucking communicate, y'know?“ That's what I said. Well, I didn't say it. I fucking screamed it. They had me in this little, crappy room; manager's office, like an interrogation it was. Like a fucking interrogation. Made me feel so fucking small. Thought they'd start some dark, twisted psychological torture on me any second. Drag some sort of confession out of my mouth. Fucking cunts. Accusing me! I'm a law abiding citizen. I make a living. Fine, being an artist makes my living a little unconventional. But I earn my place here. And I also contribute by being a full time carer. Alright! Fine, I leave you on your own sometimes. I do have a life, y'know. Fact is – I fulfil both duties – provide a piece of thought-provoking ART for the world as well as help a friend experience the ultimate, most natural human desire and somehow I become a fucking criminal. Censorship! Fucking dictatorship! Has been for years. Changed in front of our very eyes – but all so oblivious. But what else can it be, eh? Cameras watching our every move. Can't say this, can't say that, got to watch everything we do, every murmur for fear of getting reported and punished. Fucking punished for thinking like a human being. No one tells me what to think. That's why I'm an artist. Always needed to say what I like, say what needs to be said. Totally objective. Completely –

Long pause.

So where does that leave me, eh? Where does that leave – you? Stuck. That's where it leaves us. Fucking stuck. CUNTS. Robbing our humanity, our dignity, our pride. Self-worth. That's all I want. That too much to ask? A little self-worth. But people like you and me don't deserve that. Apparently. We're easy to forget about, y'see? So easy to shove us up here. Easier to file us all away than try to change it. File us away in this big fucking cabinet and then just carry on. Oblivious. (*Sighs*) I'm sorry. It's been a shit day.

Ian *slumps down in the sofa.*

It's been more than a shit day, actually. But I don't think there's a word for more than shit. Is there?

Bumped into that Mickey guy today. Yeah. Him. From the council. Used to be a dustbin man. He's been lucky. Really lucky. (*Pause*) He was with his little girl. Growing up fast. Still a

baby when I last saw her. You can see he's completely besotted with her. Just – brimming. With – LIFE.

We got talking for a bit. Me and Mickey. About his other kids and his missus. She sounds like a right nasty piece of work. Mickey loves her all the same. Mug. *(Pause)* Then this couple came along. Don't remember their names. Pretty pleasant looking. They were out shopping between shifts. He works at some garage, I think. Don't know what *she* does. But pleasant. Very pleasant. And all over each other too. Got a bit much after a while. I made my excuses and left them to it. But nice though. I said to Mickey I'd meet him and his mate – Graham, I think it was – down at the pub tomorrow night. The Old Oak. Should be good. That couple said they might come too.

Ian gets up, walks to the kitchen and stubs his spliff out in the sink. He then begins opening cupboards and rooting around in them.

You hungry? No? *(Slams a cupboard door)* What's wrong with you? You're always hungry. Not even a slice of toast? Alright. I'll get you a slice of toast then. What do you want on it? *(Pause)* Don't think we've got any marmite.

Ian goes to the fridge and brings out the butter.

Butter? You want butter? *(Pause)* But, Jase, that'll be like eating cardboard. *(Pause)* Alright. Alright. No butter. Just bland toast. FREAK.

He throws the butter back in the fridge and slams the door.

Steve enters from the bedroom and continues into the kitchen. He is naked, apart from a towel around his waist and his hair is wet. He fills the kettle up from the tap as **Ian** reaches around him into an open cupboard and takes out a half used loaf of bread. He dives in to remove a slice of bread as **Steve** turns off the tap and puts the kettle on to boil. **Ian** pulls out a piece of bread but once he has it, he looks at it in disgust and throws it down on the surface. **Steve** loiters, waiting for the kettle. **Ian** roots back through the rest of the loaf to find a nicer piece with no success. **Steve** looks around aimlessly and notices the piece of bread, but acts as if it's always been there. He picks it up and picks off the bits of mould and then tears scraps off and eats them. The kettle boils and **Steve** throws the bread back down on the surface and takes a mug from a cupboard. **Ian** gives up searching for another piece and takes the original piece, now much smaller, and shoves it in the toaster.

You don't mind a bit of mould d'you, Jase? It'll do you good. Lots of fibre.

Ian waits around for the toast as **Steve** throws a tea bag into the mug and then fills the mug with water from the kettle. The toast pops up and **Ian** drops the toast onto a plate. **Steve** picks up his mug of tea and **Ian**, the plate, and they both walk back into the bedroom.

Long silence.

Ian suddenly storms back into the kitchen.

Eat it properly! I've got all your fucking slobber all over my hand now, you retard. Urgh!
Gross!

He washes his hands in the sink.

It's good that being retarded isn't contagious because I'd be more retarded than you by now.
(Pause) Sorry. It just gets frustrating, Jase. You understand that, don't you?

Steve runs out of the bedroom, fully-clothed and dry this time. He goes straight to the kitchen sink, and throws up, ignoring the fact that **Ian**'s washing his hands. **Ian** just continues regardless. **Caroline** enters from the bedroom.

Caroline: You alright?

Steve wipes his face in one end of the kitchen towel as **Ian** dries his hands in the other.

Steve: Yeah. It all just started – suffocatin'.

Ian: All this – it's too much.

Steve and **Ian** finish with the towel and just let it drop. They both walk to the window. **Caroline** follows. **Graham** emerges from behind the sofa and joins them.

Graham: It's beautiful in a way, isn't it? Sarah?

Steve: So much concrete.

Caroline: Just that little patch of grass.

Steve: Like –

Graham: Eden.

Caroline and Ian: That rusty old swing – just – swinging. Always – just – swinging.

All: 101. Ainsbury Court. The end of the fucking world.

Beat.

Caroline: (Looks at Steve) We need to get out, don't we?

Steve: Yeah.

Ian: We need to get out.

Black.

Scene Five.

Caroline sits in the armchair, in her supermarket uniform, smoking a cigarette.

Ian is sat at the dining table behind her. From the waist up, he is slumped on the table, face staring out towards the kitchen window. He lies amongst a pool of thick, dark red liquid which seeps across the table and drips onto the floor. A smashed bottle, baring traces of dark red lies discarded on the table.

Steve comes in, wrapped up from the cold, with food from the chippy. He and **Caroline** don't even acknowledge each other. He walks to the table, ignoring **Ian** and removes the packages from the bag and places them down amongst the pool of red. **Caroline** takes a last drag on her cigarette and then stubs it out in the ash tray. **Steve** lingers.

And then, from behind, **Steve** pulls the plastic bag over **Caroline**'s head and pulls it tight around her neck. **Caroline** doesn't struggle much. Her arms just flail and reach towards the coffee table. She takes the butt end of the cigarette from the ash tray and with one swift movement, stabs it into **Steve**'s hand.

Steve cries out and lets the bag go. He nurses his hand to his chest.

Steve: Fuck!

Caroline casually removes the bag from over her head and lets it fall to the floor. She takes another cigarette from the pack, lights it and puffs away.

Caroline: So you know then. Took you long enough.

Steve: You lied.

Caroline: State the bloody obvious.

Steve: Why?

Caroline: Because –

Steve: Don't start all that shit again. Just – be honest.

Caroline: I didn't apply for anything.

Steve: Not one fuckin' thing?

Caroline: No. Not one *fucking* thing.

Steve: So all those applications I brought –

Caroline: Got rid of them.

Long pause.

You just kept on. Expecting too much.

Steve: No. No. I expected enough. For you to ‘ave a little self-respect, or at least some respect for me. But you don’t ‘ave either.

Caroline: Don’t lecture me.

Steve: And that’s pathetic.

Caroline: I feel like shit all of the time. OK?

Steve *laughs*.

I do! That’s what all this has done to me.

Steve: *(Under his breath)* You’re ‘avin a laugh.

Caroline: I wake up in the morning and I can’t even move. No energy. It’s like my whole body has just stopped. And it’s like it’s painful to even lift a limb, or turn onto my side. I just lie there – on my back – staring at the ceiling, thick, depressing mould staring down at me like a metaphor for my whole life and I physically can’t summon the strength to move. It’s like the universe just shuts me down.

Steve: *(Softly)* Bollocks.

Caroline: Seriously. Everything just seizes up. Mornings are the worst. Takes hours for me to just HAUL myself into the living room. What’s that? Thirty, forty steps? And I can’t even do that.

Steve: Not can’t.

Caroline: Oh, don’t give me all that teacher shit, „There’s no such word as can’t“. There is.

Steve *laughs*. **Caroline** *begins to cry*.

Look! I still want to be at that school, working. Making a difference. But I *can’t*.

Steve: Well you know what they say, those who can’t, teach. Maybe they shouldn’t ‘ave let you go after all.

Caroline: I’m not laughing.

Steve: Oh I am. I am. You’re a fuckin’ joke and I’ve made myself a joke as well. And for what? For what, eh? You don’t even understand what you did.

Caroline: I do.

Steve: No. You can't do. Or maybe you do understand. You're not thick. And what it is, is that you just can't be arsed.

Caroline: Fuck off, Steve.

Steve: *(Bearing down over her)* You've become a pathetic, good-for-nothin' piece of meat.

Caroline goes to slap him but **Steve** catches her wrist.

Just 'bout able to strip naked and wrap your mouth round my dick or a sausage roll, but apart from that, you're quite 'appy just as you are. You are rotten, unfeelin' and so fuckin' twisted.

Caroline: *(Pulls her arm out of his grasp)* Thank you. I'll make sure those attributes go on my CV.

Silence. Steve perches on the armchair.

Where have you been today?

Pause.

Steve: If you must know, with another woman.

Pause.

Caroline: I see. That's nice for you.

Steve: And 'er son.

Caroline turns slightly towards him. *The colour seems to drain from her face.*

Caroline: I wondered whether you would. Every morning, I think „I wonder if he'll go there, make me feel it even more". Well I can stop wondering now. You've really brought it back to haunt me, haven't you?

Steve: I didn't do it to 'urt you. You deserve that but – no. *(Pause)* I just couldn't break that bond. As much as I tried, and I 'ave tried. Really tried, fuckin' 'ard. *(Starts to cry)* I couldn't. I can't. Now that's when *can't* really means somin'. Everythin' taken away. Just like that. And, suddenly, you're just – nothin'. And I am so – lost. Whereas you – you're still in control, Caroline. And don't pretend you're not. 'Cause you always 'ave been. You made all this 'appen. Remember? This 'ole fuckin' car crash. And you won't make it better.

Caroline: *Can't.*

Steve: *(Gets up – loses it)* Won't! You gave me those photographs. Remember? *(Shakes her)* REMEMBER? You made me believe for six months, SIX MONTHS, that I had a son. You made me believe that I'd made the biggest mistake of my entire life leavin' you. You made me remember 'ow much I loved you and, 'cause of YOU, I fell in love with you worse than ever.

Caroline *laughs*. **Steve** *paces*.

And that's why I'm stuck 'ere now. With – YOU. You took away my son, my – pride and I'm still 'ere. Funny 'ow the mind works, ain't it? I didn't lose your job. You did that. And you shouldn't be surprised. Who the fuck would think of employin' someone to look after kids who did that? Who'd even think of that? Funnily enough, Facebook wan't created for twisted, mad women to thieve pictures of other women's kids –

Caroline: I –

Steve: Pass 'em off as their own. Surprised?

Caroline: Don't –

Steve: And what for, eh? REVENGE?

Caroline: You –

Steve: Who'd trust someone so obviously twisted and mixed-up to do that sorta job? Eh?
(*Pause*) Answer me!

Caroline: No one!

Steve: Exactly. And I didn't put you in this shitty council flat. You did that too. 'Cause that's what you do, Caroline. You touch somin' and it all just suddenly falls apart. And now I'm in the darkest, scariest place I've ever been with the scariest, darkest person I've ever known. And there ain't no love there. There's only 'ate. And 'cause 'ate could almost be mistaken for love, I carry on doin' all the things that lovers should do. Keep up the 'ole charade. (*Scoffs*) Charade. That's a big word for me. And it's French. A car mechanic who speaks French.

Steve *slumps down on the sofa*. *Silence*.

Caroline: What's he like?

Steve: Gorgeous. So lovin'. Carefree.

Caroline: And how's – Louise?

Steve: Fine. Just trying to be a good mum.

Steve *fixes on Caroline's uniform*.

Where did you get the uniform?

Caroline: From Maggie. A spare. (*Pause*) I'm sorry.

Steve: No you're not.

Caroline: No. I'm not.

Silence.

So this is it then.

Steve: Yeah.

Caroline: Nowhere to go from here.

Steve: We knew it'd just – break – in the end.

Caroline: You'll leave then?

Steve: Yeah. (*Gets up*) Yeah I will. (*Pause*) Get ready to call the fire brigade.

Steve walks to the kitchen. He takes out a box of matches from a cupboard and a bottle of vodka from another cupboard.

Caroline: What?

Steve: We're getting out. Startin' fresh.

Caroline: What are you on about?

Steve: I still can't walk away, Caroline. I can't. I'm an idiot. Yeah. And you're – well – you'll never change. But part of me still wants this. And why not try, eh? We 'ave fuck all to lose in the end, don't we?

Long pause. Caroline and Steve just look at each other.

Caroline: You're being serious.

Steve: Yep. What else 'ave we got? I still – love – you. Apparently.

Caroline: I lo –

Steve: Don't. 'Cause you – you just don't. It's alright.

Long pause.

Caroline: So what now then?

Steve starts to douse some newspaper on the coffee table in vodka.

Steve: We're gonna get out. Don't know why I didn't see it before. It's so bloody easy. This place goes up in flames. We get re-'oused. The council gets their lot in to fix it back up again and they put some other mugs in 'ere.

Caroline: You're *not* thick, are you?

Steve: I am. This is the thickest thing I've ever done. I could get done for arson – "cause I'm rescuin' somin that just ain't – rescuable.

Caroline: That's not a word.

Steve: Oh well. Sounds like one.

Caroline: You won't get done.

Steve: No?

Caroline: Not if you do it right.

Steve: Huh?

Caroline: Well don't just light a match. (*Smiles*) Idiot.

She takes the matches and the bottle from him. She places the bottle and matches down on the coffee table.

Distance yourself from it completely.

Steve: Right?

Caroline: Well what's the most common cause of a house fire?

Caroline *walks over to the kitchen and stands by the hob. Long pause.*

Steve: Chip pan?

Caroline: Exactly.

Steve *walks over to join her in the kitchen.*

Steve: Do we 'ave a chip pan?

Caroline: Of course. Bottom drawer.

Steve *rummages around in the bottom drawer and hauls out the chip pan.*

Steve: Why *do* we 'ave a chip pan?

Caroline: I thought it might come in handy.

Steve *places the pan down on the surface.*

Steve: So what's the plan then?

Caroline: Start it up, we go have wild sex in the bedroom, forget about it and then, hopefully – escape.

Steve: Hopefully?

Caroline: This *is* dangerous, Steve. We're in a high rise. We could get stuck.

Steve: We're stuck already.

Caroline: Good point.

Steve: So – you still want to do this?

Caroline: Definitely.

Steve: Right. So –

Chip pan.

Caroline *places the chip pan on the hob.*

Caroline: Chip pan.

Steve *takes a can of oil out of the cupboard and pours all the contents into the pan.*

Steve: Oil.

Steve *turns the knob on the hob into the 'on' position.*

Heat. Chips?

Caroline *walks to the dining table. She takes the fish and chips package and opens it up.*

Caroline: *(Passing the package to Steve)* Chips.

Steve *tips the fish and chips into the pan.*

They walk towards the bedroom.

Steve: And now for the wild sex?

Caroline: Why not?

Steve *smacks Caroline's bottom and she gives out an uncharacteristic 'girlish' yelp and giggle before they both disappear into the bedroom.*

Black.

Scene Six.

The dining table is still out. Ian and Graham sit opposite each other. Graham sits in his coat and shoes as if he's recently arrived. The table is covered in dark red liquid, the smashed bottle lying amongst the mess. Ian's shirt has a large red stain on it. The two men just stare at each other.

Graham: You gonna clean that up?

Ian: In a bit.

Silence.

Thank you. For being here.

Graham: That's alright.

Ian: I just needed someone to talk to.

Ian runs his finger through the pool of red and licks it.

Graham: You hungry?

Ian: A bit.

Graham runs his finger through the liquid and licks it.

Graham: Hmm. Not bad.

Ian: You surprised? That's the thing with ketchup. No expectations. You know exactly what you're getting.

They both begin to dip into the pool of ketchup.

What do you do? Work wise.

Graham: Council.

Ian: Yeah. But what department? Same as Mickey?

Graham: Building and property.

Ian: Oh right. So –

Graham: Yes?

Ian: You – no.

Graham: Go on.

Ian: You could get this place sorted out then?

Graham: Oh. Yeah. I could do.

Ian: We're just getting taken over now. So much fucking mould.

Graham: Yes, I can see.

Ian: It chokes you.

Graham: I can imagine.

Ian: (*Looking around*) There was a fire in here at some point.

Graham: Yes.

Ian: Obvious that your lot tried their best to cover it up. Didn't do a very good job.

Graham: No.

Ian: I sometimes feel that this whole place will just fall down around me.

Graham: I can get someone in to look.

Ian: Great. So you'll report it then?

Graham: Yeah.

Ian: You'll take it to someone high up? Get it properly sorted.

Graham: Yes.

Ian: On Monday?

Graham: On Monday.

Ian: Great. Thanks.

Pause.

Don't think I can live like this anymore. (*Beat*) Could you perhaps get us moved?

Graham: Oh. I'm not sure about that.

Ian: Do us a favour. Pull some strings.

Graham: I think that'd be pushing it.

Ian: Right. It's just – you – I'm desperate.

Graham: I know. Believe me. I'll do what I can.

Ian: Thanks. (*Sighs*) There must be more than this. All I want is that little bit more. Doesn't need to be money. Just – comfort. Could keep being poor. Won't matter. Yeah. Just – comfort. But as much as I try, nothing changes. If anything, it's getting worse. It's like I've hit a dead end and everything – it's just rotting. Everything falling apart. And now what with the police and –

Graham: Police?

Ian: Oh. It's nothing.

Graham: You in trouble?

Ian: Not really. I shouldn't be. Just a misunderstanding.

Awkward pause.

Graham: I was on your Facebook the other day. Thanks for adding me.

Ian: Oh yeah? No problem.

Graham: Saw your Graduation photos.

Ian: (*Laughs*) Don't know why I put them on. It's setting yourself up for a fall really, isn't it? Publicising yourself. So that everyone can laugh in your face when it all goes wrong.

Graham: Your parents proud?

Ian: I did an Art degree.

They laugh.

Graham: I see. (*Pause*) Where are they now?

Ian: Retired. Cornwall. Might as well be on another planet. If you want to forget that anyone else exists, go to Cornwall.

Graham: You keep in touch?

Ian: Not really. I get a Christmas card. Merry Christmas. Love Mum and Dad. Couple of kisses.

Graham: They know you're struggling?

Ian: I don't think they think about it. It would have to be something a lot more drastic to get their attention. (*Pause*) Perhaps if I – died.

Graham *can't help but laugh.*

Ian: That was funny, wasn't it?

Graham: Yeah. It was a bit.

Silence. They continue to eat the ketchup with their fingers.

Ian: So. What's your story then?

Graham: I thought I'd told you.

Ian: Hardly anything. But maybe that's because Mickey didn't stop fucking talking.

Graham: Yes. And always about his kids.

Ian: Yeah. Shows he loves them though.

Graham: I suppose.

Ian: And that girl. Sarah. Isn't she doing Dean Hayworth?

Pause.

Graham: They *used* to be together.

Ian: Yeah. They broke up. But I heard that he's been banging her again. Behind his wife's back. *(Laughs)* He is such a piece of work. Ugly cunt too. But, apparently, the women can't get enough. Especially Sarah, apparently. Just keeps going back for more.

Pause.

Graham: *(Softly)* Where did you hear that?

Ian: Just around. People talk. Especially about Dean Hayworth. He likes it that way.

Graham: Well I wouldn't listen to everything that people say.

Ian: Maybe not. But you've got to admit that most rumours about him turn out to be true.

Pause.

So. What about you then?

Long pause – Graham doesn't respond; he's off somewhere else.

Graham: Huh? Sorry. What?

Ian: Are you alright?

Graham: Yes. Yeah, I'm fine. Sorry. What was it you were saying?

Ian: Your story.

Graham: Oh. Right. Well there's nothing much to tell.

Awkward silence.

Only child.

Ian: Snap. Shit, isn't it?

Graham: Actually, I quite enjoyed it.

Ian: Right.

Long pause.

So ... Mummy's boy?

Graham: (*Defensive*) Why do you say that?

Ian: No reason.

Graham: Well, no. Actually, she hated me.

Ian: Yeah?

Graham: She *did* love me – I think. At some point. Maybe when I was born. When I couldn't really do much. But then when I could, I just made her life a nightmare. Seemed fun at the time. I remember feeling this in-built urge to test her. Hurt her. I *made* her hate me.

Ian: I suppose you just look at someone – for the first time – and just react. Sort of – instinctively.

Graham: People say – some people – that we're all in control. Of everything we do. You can't blame anyone else for what happens but yourself. (*Pauses*) I don't think that's right. There's something there which has this grip on you. Something that knows exactly where you're going.

Ian: Like fate.

Graham: Yes. I suppose – no – actually – no – like – more like – as if something – bigger –

Ian: Like – God?

Pause. They both laugh.

No. Of course not.

Graham: And you have no idea, do you? Of where you're going. You think you do. But you don't. It's just one huge storm – and you turn around one day and you're in a place that you'd never thought you'd be. Because – what you thought your life was – all that manipulating your mother, sucking up to your dad, playing them off against each other – so vindictive – that doesn't end – or can't end – the way you'd expected.

Ian: No?

Graham: No. Not at all. In fact, in the end, the people who meant the most mean the least. Funny. You love the person you hated. And you hate the person you loved. *(Pause)* You kill the person you loved. You let the one you hated – live. Funny. Of course, when you think about it, it's so blindingly obvious. Isn't it? The love you want the most you hang on for, and the love you already had just doesn't mean as much – it gets old – and – BORING.

Pause.

Ian suddenly makes for the front door. **Graham** is quick to react. He grabs **Ian** and pulls him to him, wrapping an arm around his neck and the other hand tight over his mouth.

Ian shakes and breathes heavily. **Graham** leans close into **Ian**.

And all you can ever think about is that one afternoon when you found yourself in that place you never thought you'd be.

Wet spreads across the front of Ian's trousers and gradually pools on the floor.

Doing something that you thought – although you never really thought about it before – you thought it was beyond you. When you watched your feet in those battered Nike trainers wade through a puddle, water suddenly spilling through those little holes and soaking into your socks. But you still walk, feet squelching inside the shoes through the little rickety, rusty gate. Across the puddle-ridden grass. Still squelching inside your sodden shoes. Through the dark towards the light squinting through the glass in the front door. Open the door. Into the hall. Warmth hitting your face. Sort of tingling feeling.

Ian blubs.

Ssh. Ssh. Listen. *(Firmer)* Listen. Sound of the TV. Some game show. Walk down the corridor. Follow the smell of cigar smoke. A deep cough. Your dad's. The voices on the TV, his coughing, all getting louder. Each step. Turn right. Through the doorway. Into the living room. Fire on. Flickering in the reflection of the TV. You see yourself in there too. And your dad. Who looks up at you and says „Hey, Graham. Hey son. How was your day?“ You give a grunt. He says „Ah well. That's school for you. Just try your best. That's all me and your mum expect“ And then he gestures to what's behind your back and asks „What you got there?“ And that's when you do it. Why wait? And you hit him. Hard.

Ian strikes Graham in the stomach with his elbow. Graham lets go to grab his stomach. He wheezes. But he continues, hunched over.

The hardest you've hit anybody. And this isn't just anybody – this is your dad.

Ian suddenly grabs a shard of glass from the table and comes at Graham to attack him.

But you hit him.

Graham turns suddenly, grabs Ian's wrist and knees him in the genitals.

With his crow bar.

Graham drags Ian to the table. They struggle. Graham manages to pin Ian face down on the table, hand clasped tight around his neck.

The one you picked up from his tool kit which he always left out in the hall along with his dirty boots. Mum would always scream at him for doing that. And he'd scream back.

And you keep hitting him.

Graham slams his hand down on the table. Ian flinches as he gasps helplessly for breath.

And you think you'll stop. But you don't. You just keep on going.

Graham slams his hand down on the table once more. Ian flinches and gasps less.

Because, somehow, the more you do it, the more you get into it. Like – sport. Who'd have thought it? Murdering your dad is like – SPORT. And you hated sport. Completely useless at it. And you keep on going until there's hardly a bit of him left to hit – and then you – walk out.

Ian has gone limp. The shard of glass falls to the floor. And then – stillness.

Leave the crow bar.

Graham hauls Ian's limp body back into his chair and positions him upright.

Sleep on a park bench that night. Come back the next day. Expecting police there waiting. Ready to be taken away.

Then, Graham sits back down opposite him.

But you walk through the front door and it's spotless and – silent. No boots. No tool kit left just inside the door. A strong smell of perfume hits you. And there's something eerie about it. Not quite right. You think that perhaps the night before was just a dream. A really bad but – satisfying – dream. Because, surely, this can't be the welcome you get after murdering your dad. Surely. And you turn into the living room. Cautiously. Expecting anything. And there's your mum. And she's dressed really nice. In a flowery dress. She's sat on the sofa. TV off.

Not a cigar in sight. Still that perfume smell. And she has a little coffee table in front of her with her best china tea set laid out on it. And she looks up at you and smiles. And says, „Don“t worry, Graham. Mum“s here. It“ll be alright.“ And she pats the area of the sofa next to her. And you do as you“re told. You do what she tells you. For the first time in your life. And she pours you a tea. Does it just the way you like it. A little milk. No sugar. And she passes it to you. And says, „Tell me about school“. And you do.

And then life goes on at a ridiculous pace. Finish school. Get good grades. Go to a good university. Get a good job. And keep on playing this – sport. Because you are actually rather good at it.

Silence. Ian’s upper body falls down onto the table.

Pause.

Don“t worry. You“ll soon have company.

Graham gets up, walks to **Ian** and picks him up. He carries him slowly towards the bedroom. He kicks open the door and then stops, taken aback.

Who – who are you?

Graham steps into the room.

It goes quiet.

Aaaah! FUCK! You fucking little retard. You little FUCK!

Graham comes out of the bedroom as he pulls a fork out of his arm. He’s bleeding. He throws it on the ground. He grabs a knife from the kitchen and goes back into the bedroom.

Yeah. That“s right! You spastic CUNT!

Silence.

The phone rings. And rings. And rings. It goes to answer phone.

Caroline Recorded Voice: Hi. You“ve reached Caroline and Steve. We“re not in. So leave a message and we“ll get back to you.

Electronic Beep.

Children crying. And screams from parents and children. Frantic.

Gerry’s Voice: MICKEY!

All suddenly goes quiet. Silence. The call cuts out. Electronic beep.

The light bulb flickers and dies.

The room is left in darkness. The only light is that of the moon and the red flashing light of the answer machine.

Silence.

Graham hurries from the bathroom, barefooted, and not injured in the slightest. He goes to the kitchen window and throws open the sash. He shoves his head out and gasps for air. He gradually calms. He then hauls himself up onto the sill. Takes a cigarette from a pack on the surface and then the lighter to light it. He puffs away, still noticeably distressed.

Silence.

*The key is heard in the door. The door is opened and **Steve** steps inside. He turns on the light. He is followed by **Caroline** and **Ian**. They look fine; just as they were when we first met them. **Ian** shuts the door behind him. He notices the machine flashing and presses play. They all sit down on the sofa. **Ian** rolls a spliff.*

Electronic Voice: You have one new message.

Silence. No electronic beep.

And then the Electronic Voice continues. All four lip-sync.

One last thought before you died. You all remember that night. The six of you at that table by the door. The other over in the corner, looking over from time to time. SMUG – CUNT. And it dawns on you that out of all the things that should have led here, it was the thing you least expected. Fate.

They all laugh and then suddenly stop. Serious.

No. Really. Fate.

That night. I saw it in all your faces. You thought things were better. Improving. You thought you might just have managed it –

But you should never have gone. Any of you.

You thought it was bad before. But this REALLY is the darkest, scariest place you’ve ever been and these REALLY are the darkest, scariest people you’ve ever known. And that world that you thought was so big – SEVEN BILLION – is smaller than you could ever have imagined.

Beep.

One large unified scream blares over the answer phone speaker. All mime the scream.

In the kitchen, the chip pan suddenly bursts into flame. Then the creak and sizzle of fire and Emergency Services sirens, distant, as if a memory. And then the glass in the TV explodes out

into the room. The sound of fire increases along with the sirens. And the phone rings again. And rings. And rings. And gets louder with every ring.

Graham *throws the cigarette out of the window.*

And then the ceiling collapses.

Black out.

End.

Does *Monster-Truck-Parts* mark the end of new writing?

Jonathan Lloyd

Does *Monster-Truck-Parts* mark the end of new writing?

The West Yorkshire Playhouse's new season of work has reignited the ongoing debate about the credibility of „new writing“. A seemingly provocative argument was posed by literary manager, Alex Chisholm, in her article entitled *The End of New Writing?* Although, at first, the article may appear controversial, closer reading reveals some interesting and thought-provoking questions. After more than two decades of popular usage, what is currently meant by the term „new writing“? Is simply „new writing“ no longer a sufficient title, or has „new writing“ become somewhat confused prompting a total re-thinking of the concept? Does today's „new writing“ encourage and present too much of one thing? As a playwright looking to make a mark on the theatre with writing which to all intents and purposes is „new“, it is important to consider what, if anything, my work provides which does not already exist. This is particularly important if the concept of today's „new writing“ needs redefining.

With this in mind, this essay will explore and analyse the creative process and development of *Monster-Truck-Parts*. All aspects of the play, especially those which set the play apart, will be explored and questioned in relation to wider research, the craft of playwriting and the theatre industry. Finally, the success of the play will be discussed in terms of its structure and relevance in order to provide possible answers to the questions: „Where next, both for my work and my practice?“ and „does this play fulfil the need for “The Start of Something Else?” (Kennedy, Exeunt Magazine Online; 2012)“. Or does it make the mistake of following a set idea and template of a new play which, whether deliberately or not, exists “...as some sort of ideal to which new writers are supposed to aspire”? (Chisholm, Exeunt Magazine Online; 2012)

The advantage of learning about playwriting on a specialist course is that due consideration is given to all aspects of the craft. Playwright and teacher, Fin Kennedy, suggests that there is an argument that these courses may be a reason for new writing not developing, the danger being that their approach is seen as “„the way“ to write a play” (Kennedy, Exeunt Magazine Online; 2012) and, consequently, creates a consistent output of similar work. Although this may be true in terms of stylistic direction, Kennedy also presents the counter-argument that, “[t]he „rules“ of narrative, characterisation and structure are taught this way less out of a

prescriptive or cynical desire to close down other creative approaches, but simply as a convenient handle on, and need to have a conversation about, an otherwise amorphous and deeply subjective mass of ideas. Somehow, we have to plot a course.” (Kennedy, *Exeunt Magazine Online*; 2012)

The MPhil course allowed for individual exploration and encouraged us to freely present imaginative and ambitious ideas. The idea for *Monster-Truck-Parts* came from a desire to write a triptych and also to dramatise certain real life stories in which I was interested. At the same time, the first semester focused on analysing and understanding the importance of play structure and acquiring the knowledge to identify how a particular play functions. By writing a pitch, a general direction and ultimate focus for *Monster-Truck-Parts* was immediately established and, consequently, the main structuring device of the play was formed. The play began to depart from the more usual triptych form, such as that presented in Simon Stephens’ *Wastwater*, where each interaction is in order and given its own separate time within the whole (Stephens, 2011). In *Monster-Truck-Parts*, the stories merge and take a non-linear form, becoming increasingly fragmented and intertwined with each other. This is heightened as all interactions appear to happen in the same space; that of a council flat.

Again, our studies revealed that a strong play structure required certain elements; the major one being Action, the progression of the play, to which others contribute (Edgar, 2009). In experimenting with the triptych form, it was found that the elements of time and space were significant in structuring the Action of the play. The audience are led through the play by significant time changes whilst the space remains constant. This highlights deliberate inconsistencies and, thus, poses questions which drive the play forward toward the answers. Although the aim was to experiment with the structure of time and to complicate and challenge the relationship between the audience and the situation, it was important to ensure that the audience were led through the piece and were not completely lost in its complexities. The challenge was to maintain a balance between a strong, logical structure and a seemingly illogical and jarring content. As Steve Waters explains, “A playwright must possess the capacity to gauge and not over-tax the audience’s collective powers of comprehension...a cardinal error in dramatic writing is the assumption that merely to assert something is to conjure it into being in the audience’s consciousness.” (Waters, 2010; 73) However, at the same time, it must also be remembered that “...audiences are more intelligent than the sum of

their parts and that elements of a script that appear obscure on the page become blatant in production.” (Waters, 2010; 73)

Feedback on the pitch encouraged full consideration of how the play would reveal the complexities of its time frame. How would this work on a logistical level and how would I keep the idea fresh once it had been established? My aim was to expand the device further than having the characters simply ignore each other whilst engaging in their own Action. The intention was to consistently challenge the audience and encourage them to be constantly questioning the scene. Therefore, I constructed a series of consecutive visual set pieces presenting a particular time clash. These build from subtle discrepancies such as the trail of newspaper on the floor which is relevant for Caroline and Steve but not for Ian to the more evident clashes of the „sex behind the sofa“ and „bath tub“ sequences. These set pieces work theatrically and also emphasise the time lapses and therefore the difference in the style and genre of the play. In addition, they succeed in the initial endeavour to successfully and logically structure the play from a clear beginning through to a clear, justifiable but unexpected conclusion. At the end, the visual collage further cements the Action and structure of the play by compiling these „time clash“ moments. The consequences of the chip pan fire, the culmination of the screaming voicemail messages and Graham’s suicide are played out or repeated to bring all parts of the play together into a logical ending.

In considering whether *Monster-Truck-Parts* marks the end of „new writing“ in its current form, it must be said that the play is not the first to deal with multiple disconnected time. As David Edgar explains, a trend began in the 1990s influenced by a common structure in novels in which past and present events ran in parallel. One of the first and most notable attempts at creating this pattern on stage is in Sarah Woods’ *Nervous Women*, in which a present-day couple’s habitation of one room is played in sequence with the story of a woman who was incarcerated in the same room a hundred years before (Edgar, 2009). Other playwrights such as Tom Stoppard and Howard Brenton have experimented with this form in *Arcadia* (Stoppard, 1993) and *Romans in Britain* (Brenton, 1990) respectively, but a most recent and perhaps more brave and progressive example is Mark Ravenhill’s *Mother Clapp’s Molly House*, which includes no “...direct plotting connection between the...two temporally disparate worlds [he presents] together in the same play.” (Edgar, 2009; 112/113) Also common in new writing have been plays which piece together a number of seemingly

unrelated narratives and situations involving different characters at varying times but in the same general time frame. The audience are then encouraged to interpret and connect them for themselves (Edgar, 2009). This is a notable structure adopted in a number of Sarah Kane plays (Edgar, 2009) and also in many of Simon Stephens' works, particularly that of *Pornography*, which explores eight apparently separate situations which occur in the same few days surrounding the July 7 bombings (Stephens, 2008). Clearly, this structure is similar to that of the setup of the four characters in *Monster-Truck-Parts* and its consequent theme of cause and effect. Therefore, this technique is not a *completely* original direction for a new play. However, despite its similarities to the structure of other plays, its differences are also prominent. Firstly, its time frame is more expansive, exploring relationships which in real time, happen very separately and distanced from one another. Secondly, the setting remains fixed rather than diversified. And thirdly, unlike the usual method of presenting the separate although linked situations in their own space, the Action of each situation and character overlaps and exists simultaneously. It is my belief, therefore, that these aspects of the play's time structure shows originality and a progression from the norm.

Exploration of various texts demonstrated the importance of elements working together in structuring a play. *Monster-Truck-Parts* benefited greatly from the study of Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* where speech and dialogue are intrinsic in setting up the time of the play. In McDonagh's two act play, the majority of dialogue occurs in a naturalistic home setting in County Galway. As well as increasing the tension between Mag and Maureen through the impact of Pato and Ray, McDonagh cleverly and abruptly changes stylistic direction before the naturalistic pace and setting becomes too comfortable. The first scene of Act Two begins with Pato alone in London with a minimalistic and symbolic set of a table, chair and spotlight, reading aloud his writing of a letter to Maureen (McDonagh, 1996). By breaking from the accustomed format, this scene not only shows a clear progression in time from Act One but also determines the direction of the rest of the play; Pato's letter leads to Mag's deception and her inevitable fate (McDonagh, 1996). It is a pivotal scene in driving the Action forward. This technique encouraged me to diversify, using monologue and dialogue to emphasise the time changes and clashes; Steve and Caroline's exchanges are in contrast to the monologues of Ian and Graham and suggest a plot progression. The play then also follows a rhythmical pattern from scene to scene which the audience identifies and begins to expect. As Waters emphasises, "A Playwright's rhythmic sure-footedness is the key

to their hold on the audience and their capacity to create dramatic energy.” (Waters, 2010; 81)

Although the balance between monologue and dialogue created an evident style and structure, individual scene length became a recurring problem in the overall time of the piece. Particularly in the first draft, the writing of Steve and Caroline’s interactions was the most satisfying and although Ian’s monologues and Graham’s general presence created an impact on the piece, too much time was allocated to Steve and Caroline. The dominance of these characters made the situation feel too comfortable, normal and naturalistic and the differences and originality of the play were not truly apparent until much later. It was clear that the play needed to progress more quickly. Consequently, repetition of particular facts which did not contribute to the further development of the play, such as Caroline’s unemployment, needed to be cut. Playwrights’ Workshop rehearsals identified further areas which were superfluous. Seeing the actors actively interpreting the text and observing how it worked in an active space, was an insight into how easily dialogue can lull and feel „normal“ and fail to excite or intrigue. “The familiarity of traditional, [naturalistic] theatre forms merely lull the audience to sleep; the writer has to wake them up” (Sierz, 2006; 10). As a result, I became more aware of the fact that the play had to work for itself and earn the audience’s investment. Immediate and ruthless cuts were made to sections which did not appear to build the audience’s knowledge or drive the play forward. This allowed the thought process for both characters and audience to become quicker and more progressive and I became more confident to change topic abruptly and unexpectedly. Certain topics of conversation were left hanging and unresolved thus not fulfilling the audience expectations of where the dialogue and scene were heading.

This is evident in the following exchange when we return to Steve and Caroline in Scene Two:

Steve *turns the TV off.*

Caroline: I was watching that!

Steve: I just wanna talk.

Long pause.

Caroline: Go on then. Or did you interrupt my programme for nothing?

Steve: That wan't your programme.

Caroline: Yes it was.

Steve: It ain't. Your programme is –

Caroline: I have many programmes. I like television. Now get on with it.

Silence.

Caroline: Pub tonight?

Steve: Nah. Went down after work. Quick game of pool with Mickey.

(Lloyd, 2012; 27)

One expects Steve to fulfil his intention and make conversation when ordered to “...get on with it” (Lloyd, 2012; 27) but because he fails, the silence encourages Caroline to speak and to progress the conversation in a different direction. This immediately progresses the Action of the play as her question introduces the character of Mickey who becomes an integral although unseen catalyst in the events to follow and, in fact, the conclusion of the play.

Even with these cuts, feedback from the panel at Playwrights’ Workshop highlighted that once the couple’s dysfunctional relationship was established in the opening scene, the audience were disappointed that, in Scene Two, the relationship did not develop. The sense of

difference and the absurdities of the opening scene were lost. The couple's extended arguments and bickering ran the risk of recreating a too naturalistic representation of everyday life, reminiscent of familiar, domestic, „kitchen sink“ drama which has become a common feature of today's „new writing“ (Chisholm, *Exeunt Magazine Online*; 2012). Indeed, critic Michael Billington expressed delight in discovering Fin Kennedy's work which broke away from the focus on “minor domestic upsets...” to explore “major political issues” (Billington, *The Guardian Online*; 2003), all be it from a personal and human standpoint. Consequently, it was important for *Monster-Truck-Parts* to show an element of originality and difference from the „norm“ and emphasise its focus on “the absurdity [and dysfunction] of human existence” (Sierz, 2006; 11) in the style of Martin Crimp and Alan Ayckbourn (Sierz, 2006) rather than a „normal“, everyday“ representation of human interaction and expected conflicts.

It is true to say that an audience does not merely want to see what it can experience firsthand. Indeed, the idea should be to make “people aware of the world of ... theatre ... not the outside world.” (Handke, 1970) However, I believe it important not to make the „theatre“ or the „play“ a totally alien, unrelated and „experimental“ environment where theatre loses all bearing on „real“ life. David Edgar emphasises that the playwright must expect that the playgoer will demand a number of things, one being „factual plausibility“. “Does the play fit in with our...experience of life? Do we think – or know – that [a particular character]...behaves like that? Are the[ir] actions...reasonably justified by their circumstances? Under those circumstances, do we believe that such-and-such an outcome is feasible?” (Edgar; 2009; 8) So, one has to relate but at the same time, challenge; to present the familiar and then “have the spectators in the orchestra [suddenly] thrown back upon themselves” and to “...see...with a different consciousness.” (Handke, 1970)

In fact, within *Monster-Truck-Parts*, unexpected exchanges of dialogue already existed which gave an energy to the piece and posed further questions for the audience, as illustrated in the following.

Long silence.

Steve: (*Softly*) We'll die in 'ere.

Caroline: I know.

Steve and Caroline: You'll die first.

Awkward silence.

Steve: Why do you say that?

Caroline: Just a feeling.

Steve: Same.

(Lloyd, 2012; 30)

However, such occurrences were limited. In the final draft, therefore, Steve and Caroline's presence in the opening Act has been reduced from the original three scenes into two which, although lengthy, provide a balance between the couple's volatile and unpredictable existence and Ian and Graham's random and absurd interludes. A recognisable pace and rhythm is set without the direction of the piece becoming predictable and, consequently, provides distinction from the usual „kitchen sink“ template of a new play.

During the course, it has also become apparent that, in structuring a play, dialogue provides its own structure as well as being a collaborative feature of time. Maintaining intense, fast and sharp exchanges between characters not only helps to build the tension of the play but also gives pace and direction. Despite the tendency for the repetition of ideas and the habit of over-explanation to slow down the feel of a draft, each draft of *Monster-Truck-Parts* has succeeded in confronting the audience with dialogue which contains a great deal of weight, energy and tension within it.

Inspiration for this pace of dialogue came from the short, clipped exchanges between Abby and Ben in Neil LaBute's *The Mercy Seat* which, from the outset, create a palpable tension. This immediately alerts the audience to the situation's underlying problems and encourages them to follow this tension to its climax:

Abby: Save it.

Ben: Hmm?

Abby: The phone. I turned it off to save it.

Ben: That's okay.

Abby: I know it's okay. I know that. That's why I did it, because it's okay.

Ben: Right. / Sure.

(LaBute, 2003; 5/6)

LaBute's influence in this respect is clear in Steve and Caroline's opening exchange:

Steve swills his face using his hands. He dries his hands and then his face on the kitchen towel.

Caroline: (*Without looking around*) I wish you wouldn't do that.

Steve: Do what?

Caroline: You know.

Steve: Don't start.

Caroline: Well don't do it. It's disgusting.

Steve: OK.

Caroline: I'll have to wash it now. I've told you so many times. I don't want to dry my hands on a snotty towel. Who would?

(Lloyd, 2012; 3)

Having created an immediate tension and, thus, posed questions in the audience's mind, the expectation was that this tension was maintained in order to drive the Action forward and reveal answers. These answers could not be divulged too early. If so, there would have been little to fuel the rest of the play. "The placing of events within the acts reveals the next set of considerations. How soon into the action should the first major event occur and how much time is necessary to prepare the audience for it?" (Waters, 2010; 31) It was evident that Caroline and Steve's past needed to be held back from the audience for as long as possible. This was a task which, at first, proved difficult as I believed the audience would tire and lose concentration if consistently uninformed. Again, Abby and Ben's exchanges in *The Mercy Seat* provided a resolution. We are aware that the play is set in a New York City apartment in the direct aftermath of 9/11 but LaBute retains information surrounding the tragedy's impact on Abby and Ben (LaBute, 2003). As a result, the audience await this information and when the actual answer becomes apparent, it is unexpected:

Ben: Looks like it might be higher. / Maybe six ...

Abby: Huh. / That's horrible.

Ben: Shit ... six thousand people. Fuck.

Abby: Unless they're all hiding out at their girlfriends' houses.

(LaBute, 2003; 29)

In *Monster-Truck-Parts*, it was important for the dialogue to progress and for the topic of conversation to continuously evolve so that the audience were constantly engaged in

processing events. Ian and Graham's monologue interjections assist in this, providing new plot lines which contribute to the play's intention and conclusion and provide an urgency, shift in direction and distraction from one particular thought process. As a result, the play was kept alive and moving and so a conclusion was not premature. The couple's conversations allude to a situation involving children but this is not fully revealed. Towards the end of the play, the explanation for Caroline's situation is brief and Steve does not elaborate further than,

"I didn't lose your job. You did that. And you shouldn't be surprised. Who the fuck would think of employing someone to look after kids who did that? Who'd even think of that? Funnily enough, Facebook wasn't created for twisted, mad women to thieve pictures of other women's kids –"

(Lloyd, 2012; 52)

This allows for further questions to percolate after the play's conclusion; the audience can still find life and mystery in Caroline and Steve's relationship beyond the physical time and life of the play.

From the outset, the involvement of Ian and Graham has benefitted *Monster-Truck-Parts* in setting the play apart from the „new writing“ trend. The one room setup is common for a new play, more especially from a new or emerging playwright. Recent examples include Laura Wade's *Posh* set in an Oxford college dining room (Wade, 2010) and Tom Wells' *Kitchen Sink* in a family kitchen (Wells, 2011). John Osborne's first play for The Royal Court, *Look Back in Anger*, is a much earlier example. In this play, the Action is entirely set in a bedsit where all characters are expected features of that environment and their conversation is often naturalistic and relevant to the situation (Osborne, 1978). In contrast, Ian and Graham's involvement in *Monster-Truck-Parts* is sporadic and seems separate and detached from the principal Action; the relationship between Steve and Caroline. Ian and Graham's expression and actions take a more surreal form than is usually seen in this type of setting. Their impact keeps the play fresh, not only by varying its pace and rhythm throughout, but also its content and themes. Their involvement achieves further investment and engagement from the audience. However, this more unconventional approach to the norm presented certain difficulties. As the majority of Ian's speech consisted of great swathes of monologue, one

particular challenge was in keeping both duration and content diverse. Opinion from the panel at Playwrights' Workshop was that his monologues were perhaps too long, but I was hesitant about cutting as I felt the journey was complete and clear and, unlike Caroline and Steve's dialogue, did not over explain or needlessly emphasise. For me, the intensity and length of each monologue clearly demonstrate Ian's state of mind and thought process. However, on reflection, I did feel that each monologue needed to develop and show difference in order for his involvement and impact on the play to progress. Consequently, Ian's bath scene monologue is in complete contrast to his others, not only by virtue of its length but also in illustrating his change of personality from overtly brash and confident to starkly vulnerable and insecure.

Silence.

Ian *suddenly emerges through the limbs and gasps for breath. He sits in the bath, dripping wet, and shivers.*

Ian: I don't know how it got to this. I was just doing what I thought was best for us. Trying to make us – more. Wasn't I? That's all I was trying to do. Jase? Jase? Jason?

He slides back down into the bath and disappears.

(Lloyd, 2012; 42)

Mindful of the panel's feedback but confident that the content of the monologues was essential, I sought ways of increasing the pace and intensity of Ian's speech. As a result, instead of sacrificing on content, the sentence construction was sharpened and condensed to keep each phrase as succinct as possible whilst still conveying the same intention. Martin Crimp's work was an influence here as his language remains simple and eloquent as well as challenging and disjointed; "Language breaks down, accelerating, repeating itself, non-starting." (Sierz, 2006; 11)

In his short play, *Face to the Wall*, Crimp spins a dark tale about a series of murders at a school.

Walks straight in.

Yes? Says the teacher, How can I help you?

Shoots him through the heart.

Shoots the teacher right through the heart.

The children don't understand – they don't immediately grasp what's going on – what's happened to their teacher? They don't understand – nothing like this has ever / happened before.

(Crimp, 2002; 9)

Although not strictly a monologue, being spoken by a specified cast of four, the journey and thought process of one protagonist, the killer, is relayed. The speech is urgent and immediate, broken into short phrases and sentences by pauses indicated by extended hyphen marks which reflects a frantic thought process and a concerted effort to remember and account events correctly. I was also influenced by his omitting many of the personal pronouns to further the pace, urgency and immediacy of the speech and content, shown here through the omitting of „I“ in Ian's monologue:

“The job was hardly rocket science. Went in. Whipped the old sheets off, whipped the fresh ones on, ran the vacuum round, made sure there was no floater left in the toilet bowl and that was it”

(Lloyd, 2012; 12)

This increases the pace of the speech by making it more urgent and to the point. Charlie's monologue in Fin Kennedy's *How To Disappear Completely And Never Be Found* also displays an urgent pace and immediacy which immerses the audience in the Action.

“Later, on the escalator, people are standing on the left like they don’t give a fuck and you feel like grabbing ‘em by the collar and toppling ‘em right down to the bottom...

And then the fat cunt on his mobile dawdling along the pavement in front of you weaving about so as you can’t get past ... and ... you think about grabbing the fat folds on the back of his neck and ramming his head into the post box.”

(Kennedy, 2007; 38/39)

In this case, it is also beneficial that the encounters relayed are in some way universal; the audience can easily relate to the everyday, annoying and inconsiderate behaviour which Charlie encounters. I was keen to integrate this element into Ian’s monologues to further the audience’s connection with him. This is shown through his ranting about the „Eastern European Bitch“. Although it is unlikely that an audience member will share Ian’s opinions, it is possible for the audience to relate to this recognisable racist portrayal of such a person; lazy, parasitic, useless. Not everyone, not even the playwright, has to agree in order to relate. The influence of the „new writing“ era of „in-yer-face“ is clear here, “employ[ing] shock tactics” (Sierz, 2000; 4). As Aleks Sierz explains, “Questioning moral norms, it affronts the ruling ideas of what can or should be shown onstage; it also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating discomfort.” (Sierz, 2000; 4) In essence, it gets “under our skin” and “tells us more about who we really are.” (Sierz, 2000; 4)

The writing and redrafting of Graham’s speech also proved challenging. It was evident that his presence and actions in terms of their visual impact on the play were significant and were possibly more powerful and beneficial representations of his character than any words he utters. As a result, I considered whether Graham should speak at all, more especially in the first Act. Many plays have presented characters who do not speak for the majority of the play. This device adds dramatic tension to the piece, inviting curiosity and further questions surrounding the character’s past, feelings and experiences. In Lara Foot Newton’s *Tshepang*, Ruth’s silence speaks for a deep, inconsolable pain after being raped by her mother’s boyfriend (Newton, 2005) and in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, Lucky’s silence can be seen as a result of control and oppression (Beckett, 2006). Despite Graham’s actions being solely sufficient for him to appear, there were times when I questioned whether his character was even necessary. His actions do culminate towards the play’s conclusion but I wondered whether his presence was a disadvantage to the other characters. Did he undermine the

intimacy and underlying dysfunction and brokenness of the other two relationships? I questioned the relevance of such a bold, surreal character on a play which was at its heart a genuine portrayal of relationships, the domestic and communal dysfunction. I looked to all mediums of storytelling for advice and influence. Balancing these genres is something which cinema, especially that of the independent, arthouse sector, does well; an investigation into the human condition and its flaws through the presence of a violent, more dramatic and surreal threat (Kermode, 2011). William Friedkin's recent film, *Killer Joe*, sees a family with considerable debts hire Joe to kill the mother in order to benefit financially (Friedkin, 2011). However, Joe's exploitation of Dottie and his threatening, volatile presence sees other characters become equally as violent and intimidating in order to survive. Although heightened, the characters remain believable and relatable representations of a particular American sub-culture with inherent flaws and problems.

A theatrical and perhaps dramatised threat in a naturalistic setting works in this film, but could it be utilised in a play without it seeming farcical and unnecessary? The answer lies in the fact that *Killer Joe* was first a play by Steppenwolf actor and writer, Tracy Letts. Its exploration of human flaws and weaknesses and the power of circumstance and cause and affect are familiar attributes of the „in-yer-face“ era of „new writing“, constantly forcing us to confront ideas and feelings which we would usually avoid because they are too painful, frightening and true. “They remind us of the awful things human beings are capable of, and of the limits of our self-control.” (Sierz, 2000; 6) Although Letts' portrayal of the particular social class does translate to film and many of the play's pivotal and most iconic scenes are retained, it becomes clear when comparing the two, why the story was first presented as a stage play. The most potent and shocking sequence in the play is Joe's violently abusive and intimidating simulation of oral sex with a chicken leg (Letts, 1993). Although it has the potential to be darkly comedic, the contrast between the act and the instrument and Joe's threatening, violent and disturbing use of it culminates in a scene which is gruesome and difficult to watch. The intimacy of the theatre and the fact that visual images and sequences are much more immediate and visceral without the distancing barrier of a screen means that the scene is much more affective on stage. Experiential theatre of this type, which has influenced the writing of *Monster-Truck-Parts* provides the expected theatre trait of “a comparatively safe place in which to explore such emotions”, but uses this to its benefit, its potency being “precisely when it threatens to violate that sense of safety.” (Sierz, 2000; 6)

Through this research, exploration and close scrutiny of my work, it became evident that my hesitations and doubts about the Graham character were unfounded. At first, the events which take place and unfold seem relatively bizarre, surreal and extreme but, within the context of the situation, can be understood. *Killer Joe* emphasises the fact that the presence of an antagonist progresses the Action and drives a play forward. Even when absent for a while, the audience await the antagonist's impact. At the beginning of the play, Graham's position on the window sill, establishes his rather strange and absurd presence in the whole. I trusted that the audience would, whether consciously or subconsciously, hold out for his relevance to become clear. In fact, the less he is visually present the better, as the play is then consistently working towards his next appearance and, thus, progressing and evolving. Overall, the presence of Graham and the impact he has on the Action of the play achieves exactly what my work sets out to do; to present a believable human setup but to progress it in an unexpected way, "jolt[ing] both actors and spectators out of conventional responses." (Seirz, 2000; 4)

In addition, all characters, including Graham, test the audience's interpretation of character and question their own inbuilt perceptions of what makes a person good or bad. It is common for a play to present ugly, unlikeable characters for whom, despite their appalling behaviour, the audience have some affinity. LaBute is adept at this, often portraying flawed, grotesque, and weak-willed males usually within unstable, unhealthy relationships. His play, *In the Company of Men*, and its film adaptation treads this ground. The unsavoury anti-hero addresses his accomplice and acquaintance with, "Let's hurt somebody", before seducing a deaf girl and then dumping her for what can only be described as enjoyment and sport. (LaBute, 1998)

LaBute's representation of unpleasant characters is a feature of *Monster-Truck-Parts*. Ian and Graham's behaviour is the most evident and extreme example, but Caroline's behaviour is also offensive which may seem surprising in a female role. In fact, it could even be argued that it is the female character who acts in the most grotesque and inexcusable manner. Although Ian and Graham's impact on the world around them is more extreme in its severity, Caroline's overall demeanour is that of a weak, pitiful and almost useless person. More especially, she seems to take pleasure from her behaviour and actively refuses to do anything to help herself. As with LaBute's plays, I believe all the characters in *Monster-Truck-Parts*

eventually become likeable. Their behaviour, however twisted and wrong, is seen to be as a result of their situation and previous experiences, and is something with which the audience can relate. As with *Killer Joe*, *Monster-Truck-Parts* exposes the weakness in the human condition not only in the characters but also in each audience member. As a result, it is not necessarily the violent or repulsive action itself that impacts upon the audience, but the universal human reaction it sparks; the audience are shocked by themselves and, in fact, it is not that difficult to achieve this. In plays of this vein, “the language is usually filthy, characters talk about unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each other, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent.” (Sierz, 2000; 5) Although perhaps exaggerated for theatrical affect, this is behaviour which is achievable and common in everyday life. As a result, “this kind of theatre is so powerful, so visceral, that it forces audiences to react...” (Sierz, 2000; 5) This audience response should be heightened by the play’s ending. Each member should leave the theatre, questioning themselves and what they have witnessed and their reaction to it (Sierz, 2000). In order to achieve this, it was important to leave the ending as open as possible; “the action of many plays consists of some kind of promise...contract or challenge which [can be] fulfilled in a partial or surprising way.” (Edgar, 2009; 119) As a playwright, there is often an urge to explain one’s intentions to gain certainty that the audience understand one’s aim, but one should refrain from doing so and allow for the audience’s own intelligence and imagination (Waters, 2010). Consequently, concluding the play successfully proved challenging.

Killer Joe provided a resolution. Firstly, the ending is relatively unexpected. Dottie’s character is such that we undermine her abilities, although there is a suspense and subtle foreshadowing that she is more than she seems through fleeting, unrelated comments about one’s eyes hurting (Letts, 1993). Still, her killing of her brother and wounding of her father are not expected. However, as Chris and Ansel are seen to use and exploit Dottie, the audience understand that this was the inevitable conclusion. Dottie’s exclamation that she is pregnant poses new questions as to who the father may be and the full extent of how Chris and Ansel have treated her. The gun remains trained on Joe and we expect him to meet the same fate as Chris, but in fact, his fate is left to the audience:

(ANSEL holding his stomach, SHARLA crying behind him, JOE smiling, DOTTIE with her finger tensed on the trigger, CHRIS dead in the refrigerator.)

(Blackout.)

(Letts, 1993; 72)

Letts trusts that he has plotted the play logically and consistently enabling him to trust the audience with the direction of his play. He also fulfils Steve Waters' comment in trusting that the audience is as intelligent as he is (Waters, 2010).

By changing the ending of *Monster-Truck-Parts* from the second draft's televised news report to the more symbolic and surreal answer phone message of the third, I believe that I have followed Waters' and Letts' example. The news report explained the story, giving away too many of the answers, whereas the answer phone message provides only hints and encourages interpretation. The structure of the play also aids in creating an open conclusion. The choice to bring Ian and Graham together in the final scene breaks the convention of them only speaking in monologue. This, together with the collage of visual effects, succeeds in tying together all strands of the play but still poses further questions. As with Caroline and Steve's relationship, there needed to be life left in all aspects of the play after its conclusion on stage. The ending as it stands allows the play to live on in the audience's minds; "...the...charge of a scene remains...long after it has played out and seems as vividly real as experiences in our own lives." (Waters, 2012; 200) As Waters comments, the definite conclusion or meaning behind a play should remain a mystery (Waters, 2010). As a result, "the play and the character[s] continue to live." (Waters, 2010; 202) The audience's further investment is ensured when the play is unpredictable and provides new, unexpected ideas.

To conclude, therefore, does *Monster-Truck-Parts* fulfil these needs and, in providing something new, mark the end of „new writing“? In one respect, it could be argued that it does not, as when compared with the wider history of „new writing“, the setting of *Monster-Truck-Parts* and the characters portrayed could be seen to fulfil the notion of „working-class realism“. As Aleks Sierz explains, “This means a view of society which depicted working-

class or lower-class life in an unglamorous – and often dirty – way, while stressing the truth or authenticity of this experience.” (Sierz, 2011; 17) It is not my deliberate intention to comment politically on class and current society, although, naturally, my work will be influenced by the way I see and interpret the world. Despite the characters being featured in a lower-class environment, all have actually come from or have experienced a „better“ life; Caroline, a teacher, Steve, working in New Zealand, Ian, a middle-class son with a university education, and Graham, a well-educated council official. They are a product of their own actions and circumstance. Caroline and Ian are prime examples of this and adhere to the „jobswap“ principal; due to necessity not desire, they have “profession[s] for which they are temperamentally unsuited.” (Edgar, 2009; 57) Ian, especially, does not fulfil the expected „liberal“ attitude of an artist. As a result, I do not believe that *Monster-Truck-Parts* deliberately brings the real world into the theatre and “plonk[s] it on the stage like a familiar old sofa” (Greig, 2003) to show the nation to itself. It provides characters who are different and somewhat out of place and are therefore intriguing. However, the characters are not completely distant, and I do rely on each audience member being able to relate to the instability and dysfunction of character, behaviour and the world which they inhabit in order to follow and invest in the story. Another difference is that the representation of a dirty, rundown flat is deliberately surreal and heightened and does not show this common environment in a realistic manner. Due to the unconventional time frame of the play, the flat’s condition is exaggerated as it is made up of a variety of states. Like the characters, the representation of the flat is not straight forward; it is different and intriguing.

This highly visual and sensory portrayal continues with the set pieces of the limbs in the bathtub, the „sex behind the sofa“ and Ian dead on the dining table. These all contribute towards progressing the play away from an overly realistic, domestic portrayal of a seemingly „working class“ life. These elements are in fact more akin to the „new writing“ era of „in-yer-face“ which presented and challenged social realities in a more abstract and absurdist manner, ignoring the original limits of theatre production (Sierz, 2000). Kane’s *4:48 Psychosis* includes stark and complex images of flowers growing through cracks in floorboards and even bullet holes in bodies and objects (Kane, 2001). Martin Crimp’s early work, in particular, “was written under the sign of the absurd.” (Sierz, 2006; 11) Similarly to the flat’s representation in *Monster-Truck-Parts*, Crimp often presents various views of a particular setting in direct contrast to one another. His play, *Clang*, includes “a visual image

reminiscent in its futility of the absurdist Ionesco: a man rearranges the furniture in his room until he has created a mirror image of how the room had originally looked.” (Sierz, 2006; 11) Similarly to Crimp, Kane and Ravenhill, *Monster-Truck-Parts* explores unsettling and brutal violence and crass language and behaviour. Sierz comments that by implementing elements of absurdism and brutality in a play, one can free “theatre from the prison house of naturalism, realism and rationality.” (Sierz, 2006; 11) However, it is noticeable that „new writing“ has become stuck in this „prison“ again, returning to „kitchen sink“ drama which has something „important“ to say. This may be the result of a recessionary Britain putting limits on production cost and a post 9/11 Britain placing greater focus on “political drama and a concern with national identity.” (Sierz, 2011; 19) The reason could also be that many new playwrights, like myself, are influenced by the „in-yer-face“ genre but in emulating it, are only able to achieve the naturalistic, „kitchen sink“ style, hence why this has become so common. As Edgar explains, “the archetypal cliché of in-yer-face writing, „about young people shooting up in flats“, which becomes political in the hands of writers such as Kane and Ravenhill, loses this trait when treated by their millennial contemporaries: much of the politics has burnt off, like alcohol [so] what has been left is the young people in flats” (D’Monte; Saunders, 2008; 8). However, the influence of „in-yer-face“ on *Monster-Truck-Parts* has never been political and is much more focused on the extremes of visual image and language. Still, it could be argued that whether political or visual, if my influence is mainly from the „in-yer-face“ period of „new writing“, I am not providing a new direction for today’s „new writing“. However, in the same way as *Monster-Truck-Parts* is not completely „working-class realism“, neither is it completely an „in-yer-face“ play. The techniques are similar; the setting of a council flat, violence through language and stark visual imagery, but I believe the execution is progressive and different.

However, even if *Monster-Truck-Parts* is regarded as a progression from the norm, would theatres endorse it? Although there is a “...glut of theatres ... that specialise in new writing” (Geissendorfer, The Guardian Theatre Blog Online; 2007), it seems that their focus is not innovative work, but simply a constant stream of „new writing“ to encourage audiences through the doors. Therefore, the content remains safe as time is not given to developing originality. Michael Billington has attributed this safe content to “the death of imaginative, theatrical writers” (Chisholm, Exeunt Magazine Online; 2012) but Alex Chisholm contends that there are “writers [who] are big, it is the theatres that got small.” (Chisholm, Exeunt

Magazine Online; 2012) *Monster-Truck-Parts* challenges the „new writing“ rubric, but if theatres are so set on one form, they would surely discard my work because it does not exactly fit. However, the audience also have a part to play. Crimp has shown consistent innovation but “the insularity of many British audiences has meant that he has also been consistently undervalued.” (Sierz, 2006; 2) It seems as if British audiences have higher regard for “familiar naturalistic...work” and therefore greet almost “every playwright who pushes out the envelope...with [critical] antagonism...and [they are mostly] ignored by the wider theatre-going public.” (Sierz, 2006; 11) There must be a problem with the British theatrical landscape if writers such as Crimp produce much of their new work abroad where they are embraced.

In answer to the title’s posed question, I believe *Monster-Truck-Parts* does mark the end of „new writing“ in its current form. It departs from the usual naturalism of the „kitchen sink“ genre through its absurd, visual and violent nature and is innovative with time and the triptych form. But in order for innovative playwrights to have a career in professional theatres, it is vital that industry professionals and audiences renew their attitude towards „new writing“. This is what Alex Chisholm and Fin Kennedy debated at the West Yorkshire Playhouse and the verdict was a call for the „End of New Writing“ as it is and „The Start of Something Else“. As Fin Kennedy says, perhaps optimistically, “If that means overhauling New Writing as a brand, a process and an aesthetic, and starting over..., then bring on the bulldozers.” (Kennedy, Exeunt Magazine Online; 2012) I concur and will continue to play my part, starting with *Monster-Truck-Parts*.

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